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ABSTRACT

This resource book presents readings that could be used to teach about the Holocaust. The readings are brief and could be appropriate for middle school and high school students. Several photographs accompany the text. The volume has the following chapters: (1) "From War to War" (history of Germany from late 19th Century through the end of World War II with an emphasis on the rise of Hitler and his campaign against Jews); (2) "The Holocaust" (the victims, the ghetto life, death camps, the consequences, etc.); (3) "Chronology 1918-1945" (chart showing by year and month the rise and fall of Nazi Germany, Persecution and Holocaust, and Jewish Response); (4) "Glossary"; (5) "100 Holocaust Discussion Questions (Weimar, Hitler, WWII; Nazism and Jewry; Perpetrators, Bystanders, Rescuers; and General)"; (6) "Selected Bibliography"; and (7) "Illustration Credits." Contains a 31-item bibliography. (EH)

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WORLD WAR II

AND THE HOLOCAUST

SO 025 375

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WORLD WAR TWO

AND THE HOLOCAUST

By

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WORLD WAR II AND THE HOLOCAUST

Table of Contents

I.	FROM WAR TO WAR	1-39
II.	THE HOLOCAUST	40-71
III.	CHRONOLOGY	73-85
IV.	GLOSSARY	86-90
V.	100 HOLOCAUST DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	
	WEIMAR, HITLER, WWII	91-92
	NAZISM AND JEWRY	92-95
	PERPETRATORS, BYSTANDERS, RESCUERS	95-96
	GENERAL	97-99
VI.	SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	100-104
VII.	ILLUSTRATION CREDITS	105-106

WORLD WAR II
AND THE HOLOCAUST

I. FROM WAR TO WAR

"Stabbed in the Back"

The Second World War did not just happen. It had been brewing since the end of the First World War in 1918. Actually, the two decades that separate these two conflicts now appear to us as little more than a break in the action. This is certainly true as far as Germany was concerned. Germany had been defeated in World War I but she had never been able to admit it to herself. Since no foreign soldier had set foot on her soil, the myth quickly took hold that she had not been defeated on the battlefield but had been "stabbed in the back" by traitors back home. The truth of the matter is that it was the army that had instructed the government to sue for peace because it could no longer carry on the war.

"Stabbed in the back"

The Pips Squeak

The victorious powers that gathered in the palace of Versailles in 1919 to dictate the peace were not impressed by the "stab in the back" argument and rubbed salt into open wounds. "We'll squeeze the orange till the pips squeak", British Prime Minister Lloyd George promised his countrymen. The victors forced Germany to accept a clause accepting the guilt for starting the war, stripped her of her colonies, scaled the army down to a bare minimum, and presented her with a bill she could not possibly pay. Germany's role as a power to be reckoned with seemed to be finished for years to come.

The Treaty of Versailles, all Germans agreed, was a joke, a bad joke, and from now on no politician could get elected without promising to break the "chains of Versailles."

A Fresh Start

Defeat in war sparked a revolution at home. But the attempt was feeble and failed. Instead of a socialist society based on the model of Soviet Russia (the goal of the revolutionaries), Germany eventually settled on a form of government that had every democratic device: universal suffrage including the vote for women, proportional representation, the initiative, referendum and recall. The new Germany called itself the Weimar Republic, after the city of its founding. The Weimar constitution was a most democratic document. But it was only a piece of paper. The Republic rested on shaky foundations. It carried the stigma of having been born of defeat. It had few friends and many enemies. It was a republic without republicans. It was, at best, tolerated.

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School for Obedience

Germany had no tradition of democracy. Democracy takes time to grow and there was little in Germany's past to indicate that this form of government could grow there. For much of its history authoritarianism had been the rule. People were taught to obey. In no other country was the military held in higher regard. The popularity of the military in part stemmed from that country's geographic position: at all times Germany felt threatened by hostile powers, squeezed between Russia in the east and France in the west.

Blood and Iron

Until 1871, Germany was a patchwork of more than 39 states ranging in size from a few square kilometers to Prussia, about the size of Arizona. The ideals of the French Revolution, which had been translated into parliamentary democracy throughout much of Europe in the 19th century, left few traces in Germany. Every attempt at establishing a parliamentary democracy ended in failure. In 1848, for example, it looked as if a liberal-democratic regime would take root in Prussia. But the German liberals who came to power in Berlin lacked resolution and yielded to their opponents, the conservative aristocratic landowning and military classes.

After the failure of 1848, Prussia set about uniting the German people by force. German nationalism and Prussian militarism combined to bring about the German Reich, with the Prussian king assuming the title of Kaiser (Emperor). The architect of this policy was Prussia's Prime Minister, Otto von Bismarck, whose contempt for democratic government was second to none. "The great questions of the day," he declared, "will not be settled by resolutions and majority votes . . . but by blood and iron."

The Iron Chancellor Otto von Bismarck

The policy of "blood and iron" worked well for Germany -- to a point. It succeeded in uniting the country and in making it strong. But the Germans paid a heavy price. They remained unschooled in democracy and the ways of freedom.

A Cosmetic Change

The bitter fruits of the authoritarian legacy became apparent immediately after World War I. Though Germany was officially a republic and a democracy, the real power lay with the elites that had been running the country before the war. The army officers,

judges, ranking bureaucrats, and members of the aristocracy that made up this powerful caste were anything but impartial servants of the state. In applying the country's laws, for example, Weimar's judges tended to favor extremists on the right over those on the left. Communists whose attempts to overthrow the state ended in failure habitually received stiff penalties or could expect to be murdered in the course of serving their sentences, while their counterparts on the right either got off scot-free or were given brief prison terms.

A case in point is Adolf Hitler, Germany's future dictator. In 1923 Hitler, the leader of a small party of right-wing fanatics, tried to overthrow the government. Plans for a coup were laid in a beer hall in Munich, the capital of Bavaria, a state in southern Germany. The "Beer Hall Putsch" ended in disaster and Hitler was put on trial for treason. The judges listened politely while Hitler harangued them -- then handed him a 5-year sentence, of which he served 9 months in comfortable surroundings. While in jail Hitler dictated *Mein Kampf* (My Battle), the bible of the Nazi movement.

Nightmare Years

Born in 1889 in Braunau, Austria, Hitler was a drifter, a never-do-well. His teachers remember him as a bright fellow who had trouble concentrating on his work. In 1909, he moved to Vienna, the hub of the multi-national Austro-Hungarian Empire. Pre-war Vienna crackled with excitement and was a magnet for every kind of artist and thinker. Hitler longed to be an artist, but he failed to get into art school: lack of talent, his examiners concluded. Often broke, he slept on park benches or in flophouses. For a while he supported himself painting postcards and posters which a friend peddled to tourists. Vienna, "city of dreams," turned out to be a nightmare for Hitler, and the four years he spent there were among the unhappiest of his life. In Vienna Hitler learned to hate.

Hitler in jail, 1924

Hitler Encounters Jews

There was nothing Hitler hated more about Vienna than its Jews. "Is this a German"? he asked himself when he saw an orthodox Jew clad in a long coat and wearing side-curls. Nor did he think that assimilated Jews, Jews who looked no different from Germans or Austrians, were any better. On the contrary, he thought they were a good deal more dangerous, principally because they seemed to dominate the capital's cultural life. "The Jews' activity in the press, in art, literature, and the theater, as I learned to know it," he later wrote in *Mein Kampf*, "did not add to their credit in my eyes. . . . This was a pestilence, spiritual

pestilence with which the people were infected, worse than the Black Death of former times!"

To Hitler the Jew was the devil incarnate, the seat of all evil. He became a rabid anti-Semite.

WHO ARE THE JEWS?

Jews trace their descent from the people of the ancient kingdom of Israel (10th century B.C.E.). Ever since their forced dispersion in the first century as a result of Roman conquest, Jews have scattered across the globe and settled in many lands (today they again have their own country, Israel, which was established in 1948). Judaism, the monotheistic religion of the Jews, grew out of the history of the early Jewish nation, emerging in the period immediately following the completion of the Hebrew Bible ca. 150 B.C.E. (called the Old Testament by Christians).

Jews did not have an easy time of it in Christian Europe. Christians blamed Jews for the crucifixion of Christ and buried them under an avalanche of discriminatory laws and measures. Jews, for example, were not permitted to marry or even eat with Christians. The Lateran Council of 1215 decreed that Jews had to mark their clothes with a badge and fifty years later they were compelled to live in ghettos, isolated from Christian society.

Precluded from entering most "Christian occupations", including land ownership, Jews were pushed into trade and financial professions by the Christian prohibition against taking interest on money. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries princes and kings recruited wealthy Jews to finance court and state undertakings which led to hatred against them.

The nineteenth century saw the emancipation of most European Jews, granting them equal rights before the law. But although most of the obstacles put in the way of Jews had become a thing of the past, the centuries-old prejudice against them based on religion, economic competition, greed, and envy was not. Indeed, the very term "antisemitism"--denoting hostility toward Jews as a religious, ethnic, or economic group--was coined in the late nineteenth century in Germany. To the same period, too, we owe the designation of the Jews as a "race". Until then, Jews had been regarded as a cultural, religious, and ethnic group, a community of belief comprised of many different people, but not as a separate race.

Hitler Joins the Army

In 1914, things started looking up for Hitler. War broke out. He was overjoyed. He enlisted in the German army and distinguished himself on the battlefield. For the first time in his life he felt useful and a sense of belonging. He was impressed with the military. There, at least, things were simple and straightforward. An order was an order,

and that was all there was to it. Like many Germans, only more so, he gagged on Germany's defeat, blaming it on the Communists and the Jews.

After the war, Hitler got his first real job. It was with the army and consisted of spying on political parties his employer considered dangerous. When he went snooping on a tiny rabble-rousing nationalist group which called itself the German Workers' Party, he was so impressed that he joined it on the spot and soon became its leader. In 1920 the party changed its name to National Socialist German Workers Party ("Nazi Party"). Thirteen years later it became the only party in Germany.

Hitler (in circle and inset) in raptures as Germany goes to war in 1914

The Big Lie

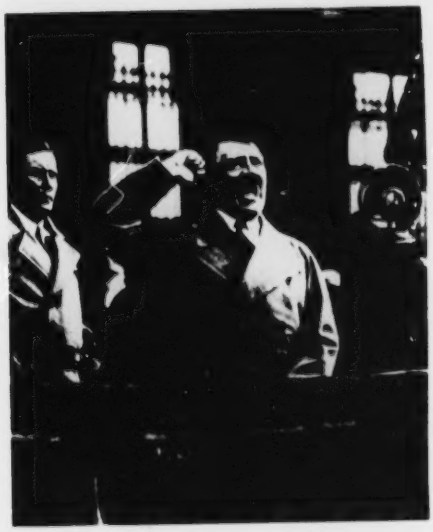
Hitler was a slick manipulator of people, and his special target was the masses. He thought that the masses were stupid and he despised them. But he realized that he needed their support in order to build his fledgling National Socialist party into a great political movement. He said he knew just how to win them over. Because "their understanding is small," he was to write in *Mein Kampf*, "all effective propaganda has to limit itself only to a very few points and to use them like slogans until even the very last man is able to imagine what is intended by such a word." And because the masses are simple, he continued, they can be made to believe anything, even a lie, and the bigger the lie the better, he cynically added, for people "more easily fall victim to a big lie than to a small one".

To Hitler the masses were important because he regarded them as the "driving force of the most important changes in the world." It was no use, however, he argued, to appeal to them with reason because only "fanaticism . . . [and] hysteria . . . drive[s] them forward."

It is the nature of tyrants to look down on people, and no one had a lower opinion of humankind than Hitler. He cared nothing for the idea of freedom and the rights of

the individual. Hitler contended that people did not even want to be free, that their real desire was to be led and to be dominated:

> The psyche of the great masses is not receptive to half measures or weakness. . . . [T]he masses love the ruler rather than the suppliant, and inwardly they are more satisfied by a doctrine which tolerates no rival than by the grant of liberal freedom; they often feel at a loss what to do with it, and even easily feel themselves deserted. They neither realize the impudence with which they are spiritually terrorized, nor the outrageous curtailment of their human liberties, for in no way does the delusion of this doctrine dawn on them.



The Big Lie in action: Hitler speaks

Hitler Speaks

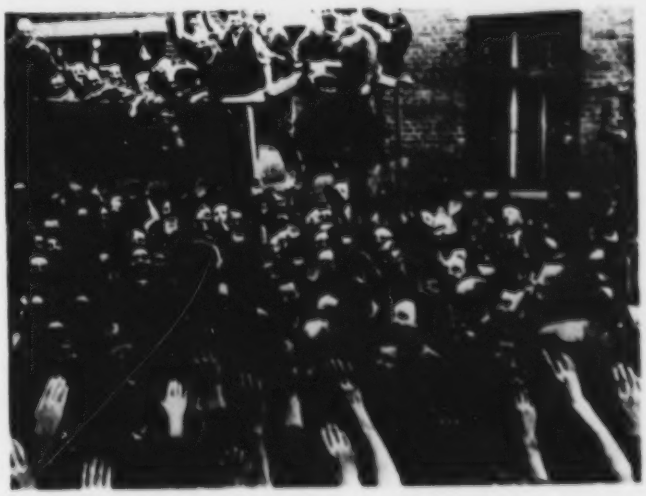
Hitler had that indispensable ingredient for political success: charisma; and his greatest asset was his voice. From the socialist orators of his Vienna days Hitler had learned that nothing was more effective in getting one's message across than speech, no matter how stupid the message. "The power which set the greatest historical avalanches of political and religious nature sliding," he wrote with typical metaphorical excess, "was, from the beginning of time, the magic force of the spoken word alone." Hitler understood the emotional appeal and the hypnotic quality of the human voice, especially if accompanied by pounding fists, burning eyes, hoarse cries and hysterical behavior -- his -- and artfully staged amid pomp and circumstance: flags and banners flapping in the wind, trumpets blaring, and the thud of row upon row of goose-stepping automatons in uniform.

After hearing him speak at a rally in 1923, a woman wrote:

> I have never heard any other speaker . . . who was so able to penetrate into the soul of the individual. . . . You cannot imagine how silent it becomes as soon an this man speaks; it is as if all of the thousand listeners are no longer able to breathe. When he angrily condemns the deeds of those who have ruled our people since the revolution and those who now prevent him and his followers from settling accounts with those November big-wigs [people accused of "stabbing Germany in the back"], cheers ring through the hall for minutes on end. There is no silence until he waves his hands repeatedly to

> indicate that he wants to continue speaking. . . . Adolf Hitler is so firmly convinced of the correctness of his nationalistic views that he automatically communicates this conviction to his listeners. God grant that, as trailbreaker to better times, he will be able to gather many more racial comrades under the Swastika. After all, every class is represented. Workers and lower-ranking civil servants, officers and storm troopers, students and old pensioners -- all sit together, and all are in agreement with the great concept embodied in the person of Adolf Hitler. . . . Sometimes it seems to me as if Hitler used a magic charm in order to win the unconditional confidence of old and young alike. When one considers, however, that the common man, suffering from the spiritual malaise that goes hand in hand with economic misery, seeks stability and finds it in the one man who will not disappoint him, then one understands the jubilation that is evoked by his very appearance.

Hitler cast himself as the savior of Germany, replete with religious imagery. In the memorable opening scene from a famous Nazi propaganda film Hitler is depicted as a god coming out of the sky: his plane emerges from silver-tinged clouds in a blaze of light to make its descent, serenaded by music from Richard Wagner, his favorite composer. He stayed clear of marriage until the final days of the war (when he married his long-time mistress Eva Braun) and he would have no children, as if to proclaim to the world that he had no other love but Germany. He passed himself off as an ascetic -- the man who subordinates his own pleasure for the good of his country -- but he was mad about film, cakes and sweets.



Something for Everybody

Hitler understood that he could not win the masses simply by ranting and raving against the Jews and the Communists, or with promises of undoing the Treaty of Versailles and of restoring Germany's greatness. He needed a social program as well, something that would address the grievances of unemployed

workers, landless farmers, petty civil servants, office clerks, ill-paid teachers, and small shopkeepers being squeezed by the big department stores -- economically vulnerable groups courted with equal fervor by the Communist Party. At the first public meeting of the Nazi party in 1920, Hitler outlined a 25-point program that included promises of more territory for Germany, full citizenship only for people of "German blood," confiscation of war profits, low rentals to small businessmen, anti-Communism and old age pensions. He also cleverly appended the word "Socialist" to the Party name -- a meaningless gesture, it turned out, for the Party dropped the "social" aims soon after it came to power in 1933. Another of Hitler's big lies.

A Nazi newspaper announces: "The Race Question is the Key to World History"

The Party Grows

Under Hitler's dynamic leadership the party grew, though initially not by much. Banned after the abortive coup in Munich, it began picking up steam again after its leader was released from jail. Nor was it any longer interested in taking power by force. Although Hitler had nothing but scorn for the Reichstag, the German parliament, calling it a "talking-shop" and the bane of the German people, the failure in Munich had impressed upon him the necessity of taking the legal route, of using the democratic process and institutions to achieve this end. "We shall have to hold our noses and go into the Reichstag", he confided to his friends.

"A Junk-store of Tired, Second-Hand Ideas"

By the time Hitler left jail in 1924, his world view was set as in stone. Its centerpiece was the dubious concept of race, which he cloaked in pseudo-scientific jargon to give it an aura of respectability. "All that is not race in this world is trash," he concluded with characteristic disdain for subtlety. Hitler divided the peoples of the world into superior and inferior races. The German people and other people of northern stock, he asserted, were the Master Race – the Aryans. The ideal Aryan was blond, blue-eyed, tall and well-built. Hitler had dark hair and brown eyes. Goering, Hitler's second in command, was round and flabby; Goebbels, Hitler's master propagandist, was the unlikeliest Aryan of them all: Goebbels was frail and short and walked with a limp.

For Hitler race played the same role as class in Marxism: it was the key to history, the magic formula that explained all. For Hitler and his followers it explained why Germany had lost the war. "If we let all the causes of the German collapse pass before our eyes," Hitler declared, "there remains as the ultimate and decisive cause the non-recognition of the race problem and especially of the Jewish danger. . . . All really important symptoms of decay of the pre-War time ultimately go back to racial causes."

"He Who Wants To Live Should Fight" – Hitler

Hitler glorified war and conquest. To him history was a struggle among the races in which only the fittest races deserved to survive. The only criterion for fitness was racial purity. "The whole work of nature," he wrote, "is a mighty struggle between strength and weakness – an eternal victory of the strong over the weak." In his view, there was no future for the Aryans unless they went about conquering and enslaving the "inferior" races who would otherwise bury them by the sheer weight of numbers. The State, Hitler declared, was merely a "means to an end, and as its end it considers the preservation of the racial existence of men." As far as Hitler was concerned, there was no greater sin than the mixing of the races, which he maliciously referred to as "blood poisoning." A race had to keep itself "unpolluted," Hitler preached, not only because its very survival and the degree of its culture depended on keeping it so, but also its chances of some day becoming "masters of the world." Summing up his life-mission, Hitler wrote:

> What we have to fight for is the security of the existence and the increase of our race and our people, the nourishment of its children and the preservation of the purity of the blood, the freedom and independence of the fatherland in order to enable our people to mature for the fulfillment of the mission which the Creator of the universe has allotted also to them. Every thought and every idea, every doctrine and all knowledge, have to serve this purpose.

Hitler was so enamored of these ideas that when it finally dawned on him that Germany had lost the Second World War he felt that the German people had betrayed him and thus deserved to disappear from the face of the earth.

Hitler and Darwin

Hitler's theories on race were not new. The basic principles of race-thinking were derived and adapted from the works of the great nineteenth-century British naturalist Charles Darwin whose *The Origins of the Species by Means of Natural Selection or The Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859) tried to explain the development of life-forms as the product of a struggle for existence.

"The White Man's Burden"

Take up the White Man's Burden-
Send forth the best ye breed-
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild-
Your new-caught sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.

Rudyard Kipling

Social Darwinism

The pseudo-science resulting from the application of Darwin's theories about the survival of the fittest to human society is called Social Darwinism. Social Darwinist principles regarding the "struggle for existence" and the "right of the stronger" provided the "scientific" cover for the enslavement and decimation of colonial peoples, the use of war and force, and the extermination of so-called inferior races.

Charles Darwin, himself a very humane man, made a great error in applying the "laws" from the animal world to the social life of human beings. He was in error not only because his theories laid the foundation for forms of thinking that are fraught with danger, but also because the tendency to reduce all human beings to racial categories leads to a denial of humanity's rich diversity -- historical, social, cultural, and political. For there are no pure races. Giftedness, ability, and talent are conditioned by cultural conditions and opportunity rather than the product of a particular "racial" inheritance. Moral superiority does not flow from being the "stronger" or the "fittest". On the contrary, the "fittest" often are able to "survive" only by reducing their moral principles to silence. To take as the standard of superiority the victory of the strongest and struggle as the highest good is to negate the proven fact that more can be accomplished by cooperation and mutual assistance. Finally, racial thought runs counter to scientific evidence as well as to Judeo-Christian and Western humanistic traditions, with their stress on the values of compassion, tolerance, the rights and welfare of the individual, and respect for the sanctity of life.

Aryans and Jews

In a classic example of scapegoating, Hitler blamed the Jews for all of Germany's and the world's problems. He was convinced that the Jews would not rest until they had the world eating out of the palm of their hands, and he whipped up people's hatred of Jews by playing on fears that had absolutely no basis in reality. But fear is at the root of all prejudice, and the causes of anti-Semitism are no different from the causes for the discrimination against and persecution of other minorities. Scapegoating is a necessary feature of totalitarian systems of government, in that it serves to divert attention from the shortcomings that are built into these systems themselves.

The ultimate struggle for control of the world, Hitler believed, would be a combat to the finish between two "races" -- Aryans and Jews. In this final battle, Hitler felt called

by no other than the Almighty God: "If, with the help of the Marxian creed," he wrote in *Mein Kampf*,

> "the Jew conquers the nations of this world, his crown will become the funeral wreath of humanity, and once again this planet, empty of mankind, will move through the ether as it did thousands of years ago. Eternal Nature inexorably revenges the transgressions of her law. Therefore, I believe today that I am acting in the sense of the Almighty Creator: *By warding off the Jews I am fighting for the Lord's work.*"

Hitler accused Jews of chasing after the very thing that was in his own mind. It was Hitler who dreamed of world conquest, and he would let nothing and no one stand in the way to achieve this goal, neither Soviet Russia, which he flayed as Germany's principal enemy, nor the democracies of the West, which he scorned as old, rusty machines ruled by stupid majorities. He promised to put an end to all that. Hitler was a man possessed.

THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC COLLAPSES

4.2 Billion Marks = $1.00

The troubles of Germany never seemed to stop. In the same year Hitler tried to topple the government (1923), French troops marched into the Ruhr, Germany's great industrial belt. This was the French response to Germany's failure to live up to the reparation clauses of the Treaty of Versailles. Having occupied the Ruhr, the French next ordered the miners to work for them; the miners refused and walked off their jobs. The Germans were outraged and put up a wall of resistance.

"This is not what I intended." Gutenberg is aghast at the use his press has been put to.

One of the unforeseen byproducts of the invasion was the total collapse of the mark. By the fall of 1923 one American dollar was worth 4.2 billion German marks. A wheelbarrow filled with marks bought a loaf of bread. Often workers insisted on getting paid twice a day, in the morning and at lunch, to keep up with the pace of inflation. People quickly found novel uses for their worthless money -- it took the place of wallpaper, it appeared on wine bottles as labels, and it even showed up in bathrooms.

The inflation had a deeply demoralizing effect and dealt a heavy blow to the prestige of the Republic. The impact on people with fixed incomes was devastating; the middle classes saw their savings go down the drain. To make matters worse, while the majority suffered, a few financial speculators flourished. Conditions became chaotic. Eventually the government gave in to the French and promised to resume payment.

The Market Crashes

A brief period of recovery and stability followed. Then the roof caved in. The New York stock market crash of October 1929 ushered in the world economic crisis known as the Great Depression. The Depression hit Germany like a bolt from the blue, spreading unemployment, hunger, and chaos. The Nazis were delighted. Bad times for the country were good times for the Party. National Socialism would ride the wave of misery all the way to power.

Unemployed in Berlin, 1932

Until then, until the Depression, the Party had not been much of a factor on the national political scene. In the election of 1930, however, with three million unemployed, both the Communists and the Nazis, extremist parties promising extreme solutions, won big. The Nazis polled 6.5 million votes, the Communists 4.5 million. The Nazis were overjoyed.

By 1932, the number of unemployed had doubled, and in two elections held that year the Nazis polled more votes and took more seats than any other party. "If you want the country to go Bolshevik," ran the Nazi slogan, "vote Communist, if you want to remain free Germans, vote Nazi." Hitler stumped the country dangling a large assortment of enticements before the desperate and the confused: jobs for the workers; protection for the small shopkeeper against the large retailer; super profits for the industrialist; fair prices for the farmer and a prominent place in the Nazi scheme of things; restoration of Germany's military glory for the militarist, and the undoing of the hated Versailles treaty for everyone. Traditionalists were won over with promises to clean up Berlin's nightlife, widely regarded as immoral, and the confinement of women to the home.

Finally, on January 30, 1933, Hitler's dream came true: he was appointed chancellor, that is, head of the government. The Weimar Republic was dead.

STATE BUILDING NAZI-STYLE

Hitler in Power

On the night of the 30th, 15,000 chanting and torch-carrying SA men, Hitler's private army, joined by thousands of ecstatic supporters, filed past the chancellor's office to celebrate the Fuhrer's triumph. Their idol stood at an open window, laughing and bowing and gesticulating with childish joy, barely able to contain himself. In his own mind, he had much to be pleased about: he had achieved power, and done so legally. Soon there would be only one master in the German house: himself.

The Reichstag Goes up in Flames

One of Hitler's first acts as chancellor was to call new elections. Held in March, they were to be Germany's last "free" elections until 1949. To ensure victory, the Nazis did everything they could to intimidate the voters. Under cover of Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution, which permitted the head of government to rule by emergency powers, thus bypassing the Reichstag, they issued one emergency decree after another. Many of these were designed to cut the ground from under the feet of the opposition parties; for example, by curtailing the right of assembly and by suppressing their newspapers. On the night of February 27, 1933, a week before the elections, the Reichstag building went up in flames. The Nazis, who probably set the fire themselves, accused the

Early in March, after the elections, it turned suddenly mild and warm. "Hitler's weather," said the porter's wife; and her son remarked jokingly that we ought to be grateful to van der Lubbe [the person convicted of setting fire to the Reichstag], because the burning of the Reichstag had melted the snow. "Such a nice-looking boy," observed Frl. Schroeder, with a sigh. "However could he go and do a dreadful thing like that?" The porter's wife snorted.

Our street looked quite gay when you turned into it and saw the black-white-red flags hanging motionless from windows against the blue spring sky. On the Nollendorfplatz people were sitting out of doors before the cafe in their overcoats . . . . Goering spoke from the radio horn at the corner. Germany is awake, he said. An ice-cream shop was open. Uniformed Nazis strode hither and thither, with serious, set faces, as though on weighty errands. The newspaper readers by the cafe turned their heads to watch them pass and smiled and seemed pleased.

They smiled approvingly at these youngsters in their big, swaggering boots who were going to upset the Treaty of Versailles. They were pleased because it would soon be summer, because Hitler had promised to protect the small tradesmen, because their newspapers told them that the good times were coming. They were suddenly proud of being blond. And they thrilled with a furtive, sensual pleasure, like schoolboys, because the Jews, their business rivals, and the Marxists, a vaguely defined minority of people who didn't concern them, had been satisfactorily found guilty of the defeat and the inflation, and were going to catch it.

The town was full of whispers. They told of illegal midnight arrests, of prisoners tortured in S.A. barracks, made to spit on Lenin's picture, swallow castor-oil, eat old socks. They were drowned by the loud, angry voice of the Government, contradicting through its thousand mouths.... The whole city lay under an epidemic of discreet, infectious fear.

Christopher Isherwood, *The Berlin Stories*, New York 1963.

Communists. The day after, they rescinded such basic civil rights as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, the privacy of postal and telephone communications, and the inviolability of property. In the meantime, Hitler's Storm Troopers (SA) were roaming the streets beating up the Party's opponents. Despite all that, the Nazis still failed to capture a majority of the votes. No matter: Hitler simply prevented his opponents from taking their seats in the Reichstag.

Hitler Goes to Work

The Reichstag soon evolved into a mere rubber stamp for all of Hitler's actions. Right after the elections, the new chancellor cowed the Reichstag into transferring its legislative power to the government by ramming through the Enabling Law. As the

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deputies were voting on the bill, they could hear Storm Troopers outside shouting, "We want the bill or fire and murder." Hitler had created the "legal" framework for his dictatorship. It would last from 1933 to 1945.

The next two years saw Hitler consolidating his power into a full-fledged dictatorship. Respecting neither law nor morality, he used every weapon at his disposal to eliminate his enemies and to "coordinate" every aspect of German life, especially thought, within the framework of the totalitarian state. He found many who were only too eager to follow his lead. In the evening of May 10, 1933, for instance, thousands of young Nazis marched to the square in front of Berlin University. The torches they carried were for a rite that had not been seen since the Middle Ages. "Because of insolence and arrogance! With honor and respect for the immortal German folk spirit! Consume also, flames, the writings of . . . " -- and then followed the name of an author on the Nazi blacklist: Sigmund Freud, Bertold Brecht, Jack London, H.G. Wells, Thomas Mann -- thirty-four in all. Their books were cast into the fire. Among the books devoured by the flames that night were those of the German-Jewish poet Heinrich Heine, who one hundred years earlier had remarked: "Where they burn books, they burn people also."

Rounding up books for burning

"The Night of the Long Knives"

By the end of summer 1933 the Nazi party was the only political party left in Germany. Education, culture, the press, the labor unions, the Churches -- all were swept into the Nazi net. Meanwhile, the first shipments of opponents of the regime had been arriving at newly-established concentration camps -- "protective custody," the Nazis called it. Soon these would hold thousands of prisoners: political enemies; religious leaders out of step with Nazi beliefs; Jews; homosexuals; intellectuals, as well as other so-called "undesirables" -- all those, in other words, who did not toe the Nazi line or fit Nazi standards of citizenship.

Party and State soon became one. After the death of President Hindenburg, Germany's formal head of State,in 1934, Hitler took over that post as well. The common soldier no longer swore loyalty to the constitution or vowed to protect the nation, as before, but pledged "unconditional obedience" to Hitler personally, "Fuehrer of the German Reich and People." This was part of a deal Hitler had struck with the Army, which felt threatened by the growing power of the Nazi Storm Troopers; in return, Hitler promised

to clip the wings of his Storm Troopers and to embark on a program of rearmament. On June 30, 1934, Hitler carried out the first part of this bargain. That night blood flowed freely as Hitler's henchmen killed off the leaders of the SA and thousands of its members.

"School for Barbarians"

In this way Hitler imposed a conformity on the nation that was frightening to behold. Take education. Instead of developing thinking individuals, the Nazi goal was to turn out little Hitlers. The National Socialist outlook pervaded the curriculum. "How many people", read a typical Algebra problem, "can seek protection in a bomb-proof cellar, length 5 meters, width 4 meters, and height 2.25 meters? Each person needs 1 cubic meter per hour, and they remain there for three hours." Physics fared no better in staying clear of the Nazi grip. "A coast artillery gun is firing at a ship steaming at a speed of thirty knots diagonally toward the point where the cannon is. How great is the approach? The average speed of the projectile is to be assumed as 600 meters per second."

It was the same with history -- it had to reflect Nazi dogma. The teaching of history was reduced to a few simple formulas such as, "The history of the world is to be regarded from the racial point of view"; "The crown of all teaching of history consists of nothing but following the Fuhrer."

All students had to take racial biology, which included being able to identify differences in skull types between Aryans and Slavs. A typically absurd assignment might consist of having students summarize "the spiritual characteristics of individual races" or collecting propaganda posters and caricatures for their "race book."

Knowledge as such received short shrift. The scale of values, in order of importance, was set by the Fuhrer. Most important was to learn about the racial picture. Next came character, that is, the degree of adherence to National Socialism; then came physical "makeup" or "body" -- in the high schools five hours a day were set aside for physical education. Last, and certainly least, came knowledge. We are not interested in educating "our children into becoming miniature scholars," a Nazi educator asserted. "The real values resting in the German child are not awakened by stuffing a great mass of knowledge into him. . . . Therefore, I say: Let us have, rather, ten pounds less knowledge and ten calories more character!"

An important tool for building character the Nazi way was the Party's youth movement, which all boys and girls were urged to join. The League of German Girls

The Aryan cult of the he man mocked. 'A healthy body houses a healthy mind - but sometimes only a very small one.'

enrolled girls between 14 and 21; the Young Girls those between 10 and 14. Their activities prepared them for a life spent toiling over a hot stove and changing diapers. The Hitler Youth, the cream of Nazi youth organizations, was open to boys aged 14 to 18. The bulk of their activities centered on keeping fit. Thirteen-year olds were expected to march 11 miles a day; 15-year-olds, 13 1/2 miles, carrying an eleven-pound load. Doctors suddenly noted an alarming increase in the incidence of flat feet among teenage boys.

"They wanted to turn us into people who would automatically approve of everything the State did", recalled a graduate of Nazi school and youth organizations. "People," he continued, "who are raised to believe that their nation, their community, and their society comprise the highest good -- such people can also be made to kill for these things without feeling the slightest pang of conscience; on the contrary, they will feel good after having done their duty."

Long hikes and flat feet

The Total State

Totalitarianism is a term that describes Hitler's control over every aspect of German life. Such control, brooking no opposition, enabled Hitler to carry out his policies at home and abroad free from serious interference. The so-called "Leadership Principle" replaced the give-and-take that characterizes the democratic process. The word of the leader – Hitler -- was law. The same principle, Germany's dictator decreed, was to take root in all areas of life. The courts, for example, either did the Fuhrer's bidding or were bypassed. "This is the last time a German court is going to declare someone innocent whom I have declared guilty," Hitler bristled when the dissident Protestant pastor Martin Niemoeller was acquitted by the courts.

In the 1930's, Hitler's promise to lift Germany out of the Depression seemed not to have been an idle boast. Unemployment was much reduced by the expedient of pumping money – lots of money -- into the economy. The government initiated the construction of freeways (used during the war to expedite the movement of troops and materiel), encouraged state and private building, and provided industry with armament contracts, government loans, and tax breaks to finance expansion. Independent trade unions became a thing of the past. Citizens were forbidden to take their money out of the country and imports were strictly controlled. A series of barter agreements negotiated with the states of south-east Europe enabled Germany to exchange her industrial goods against agricultural products without having to dip into its precious foreign currency.

All of these measures helped to stimulate widespread industrial recovery. But Hitler's promise to protect the "little people" from the department and chain stores got lost in the shuffle. Likewise, although many of the unemployed rejoined the labor force, their wages tended to remain static, and now they no longer had the trade unions to fight on their behalf. Contrary to official Nazi ideology, women entered the job market in larger numbers than ever before. But then, Hitler was more concerned with restoring German pride -- which he succeeded in doing beyond all imaginings -- and with promoting an image of a people united as one in the struggle for the common good, than with keeping each and every promise made in the course of the long climb to power.

"Jews not wanted"

Jews Not Wanted

There was one group of people, however, who were not invited to celebrate the new Germany. These were the country's Jewish citizens. Like many Germans, Jews had not taken Hitler's writings or speeches very seriously. They regarded as mere campaign rhetoric all those awful things he said about them and threatened them with once in power. In the course of time, they would learn that Hitler meant every word of it.

From the very start, the new German leader began persecuting this tiny minority, less than one percent of the population. The Nazis initiated their anti-Jewish campaign on April 1, 1933, with a boycott of Jewish-owned businesses and services. The British author Christopher Isherwood described the scene at one of Berlin's Jewish-owned department stores:

> On the morning of the Jewish boycott, I walked round to take a look at Landauers'. Things seemed very much as usual, superficially. Two or three uniformed S.A. boys were posted at each of the big entrances. Whenever a shopper approached, one of them would say: "Remember this is a Jewish business!" The boys were quite polite, grinning, making jokes among themselves. Little knots of passers-by collected to watch the performance -- interested, amused or merely apathetic; still uncertain whether or not to approve. There was nothing of the atmosphere one read of later in the smaller provincial towns, where purchasers were forcibly disgraced with a rubber ink-stamp on the forehead and cheek. Quite a lot of people went into the building. I went in myself, bought the first thing I saw -- it happened to be a nutmeg-grater -- and strolled

out again, twirling my small parcel. One of the boys at the door winked and said something to his companion. I remembered having seen him once or twice at the Alexander Casino, in the days when I was living with the Nowaks.

The first anti-Jewish discriminatory laws were passed less than a week later. One of these, "The Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service," bluntly stated: "non-Aryan [that is, Jewish] civil servants must retire." At the same time, Jews were denied admission to the bar. This was followed by a law prohibiting the slaughter of animals in accordance with Jewish dietary laws, and another limiting the number of Jews who could frequent German schools ("Law Against the Overcrowding of German Schools"). Jewish doctors could no longer serve with the National Health Insurance, an important source of income for many. And as 1933 passed, "non-Aryans" were barred from the German stage, excluded from journalism and from showing their art and performing their music in public.

Germany: April 1, 1933

Shock and Outrage

The anti-Jewish actions and legislation of the first year was a terrible blow to the Jews of Germany whose love for Germany knew no bounds. They were shocked, baffled and bewildered. A leading rabbi announced: "The thousand-year history of Jews on German soil has come to an end." Not in living memory had antisemitism been official state policy. Jews had always thought of themselves as Germans, no different from their fellow nationals who happened to be Catholic or Protestant.

Most Jews, however, could hardly believe that a beginning had been made with a process that would gradually strip them of every mark of civilized existence. They hoped that Hitler would soon pass, as had so many of their oppressors in the past, and that the responsibilities of power would slake his hatred.

As the second year of Hitler rolled around, it indeed looked as if the worst was over: the anti-Jewish actions abated. There were several reasons for this, not the least of which was that Jews could not be dislodged from the German economy at this time without damaging the chances for recovery. In addition, the possible repercussions of foreign opinion still were sufficiently important to tone down the anti-Jewish campaign. In New York, for example, rallies had been held to protest Nazi Jewish policy, and there were calls for a boycott of German goods.

The irony was that Germany could not have wished for better citizens than the Jews, whose total number did not exceed 500,000. They were energetic and intelligent, accounting for a disproportionately large share of Germany's Noble Prize winners. They had distinguished themselves in the arts, the theater, and in literature. They had been pioneers in banking and in industry. And they were patriotic. Germany's soldiers marched off to war in 1914 to the strains of the "Song of Hate against England", composed by a Jew. Per capita, more Jews died or were wounded in the course of this war than non-Jews. There was not a single area in German life on which Jews had not left a positive mark. But all this counted for nothing in the Nazi scheme of racial hatred.

"Say Yes to Judaism"

Ejected from the German mainstream, reviled at every turn, Jews made a valiant effort to find renewed meaning in their own tradition, which most of them had long since abandoned in favor of assimilation. Synagogue attendance went up; more Jews read books with Jewish themes; Jewish newspapers exhorted Jews to "Say Yes to Judaism" and ran contests inviting Jews to describe their "strongest Jewish experience." But the "return to Judaism" never really took hold, for Jews remained Germans first and Jews second. Ousted from the German theater, the celebrated German-Jewish stage director, Max Reinhardt, expressed a well-nigh universal Jewish feeling when he remarked:

Ostracized, German Jews try do develop their own way of life

> The decision finally to separate myself from the German theater is not easy for me. I lose the possession not only of thirty-seven years of activity but, even more, I lose the land on which I have built for a lifetime and on which I myself grew up. I lose my homeland. I need not say what this means to those who place this concept above everything else.

The Nuremberg Laws

It was not until the spring of 1935 that the anti-Jewish campaign was revived in full force, culminating in the September legislation known as the Nuremberg Laws. These laws robbed Jews of their German citizenship, prohibited them from marrying Aryans and from employing in their households Aryan women under the age of forty-five, and from

flying the German flag. Two months later a Jew was defined as a person with three Jewish grandparents or someone with two Jewish grandparents who identified as a Jew, was married to a Jew, or belonged to a Jewish community.

The legislation defining Jews was an important step on the road to the destruction of the Jews. It provided the basis for hundreds of additional laws, decrees, ordinances and regulations designed to eliminate Jews from every area of national life. But it also demonstrated, much to Nazi embarrassment, that the racial laws had no basis in science. However much Nazi educators might expound the bodily differences between Jews and Aryans ("Jews have different noses, different ears, different lips, a different chin, a completely different face than we Germans. . . . They have flat feet. Their hair, their eyes, are different from ours. They have longer arms than us.") -- when Germans were required to adduce proof of Aryan descent they were forced to rely on church records. Had it been possible to tell the races apart merely by applying "racial science", there would have been no need for the Nuremberg Laws, or any other laws aimed at keeping German and Jew apart.

The official explanation -- propaganda -- on the German side had it that, based on these laws, it might "be possible still to create a level ground on which the German people may find a tolerable relation towards the Jewish people." Jews certainly hoped so, but most of them realized that this was just talk. They knew that the loss of citizenship meant that they could no longer rely on the state for their protection, for the Nuremberg Laws had transformed Nazi racial doctrine into German law. Any antisemitic act now had the stamp of legality.

"Kristallnacht"

A relatively quiet period followed the legislation which condemned Jews to pariah status. This deceptive calm lasted through 1936, the year Germany hosted the Olympics. Interestingly, not a single nation protested Nazi racism by withdrawing from the Olympics.

The Night of Shattered Glass

The situation changed again in 1938. After a five-year unbroken string of German domestic and foreign policy successes, there apparently was no longer a need to go easy. 1938, dubbed "The Year of Understanding" by the Fuhrer, witnessed a grueling series of Jewish persecutions. One of these was an order compelling Jews to register their enterprises and property, presaging their outright confiscation, a robbery that was to be carried out under the polite name of "Aryanization." Another canceled

the licenses of Jewish doctors and lawyers and prohibited them from offering their services to non-Jewish clients. A third forced Jews to adopt "Jewish-sounding" first names, such as Sarah and Israel. Then, following the murder of a German diplomat in Paris by a distraught Jewish teenager named Herschel Grynzspan, all hope died for German Jewry. A few weeks earlier, Herschel's parents had been among the 15,000 Jews of Polish nationality living in Germany who had been shipped from Germany to Poland under horrible conditions. Herschel took revenge by killing the German diplomat.

In the night of November 9/10 Nazi thugs wielding crowbars, torches, and axes went on the rampage throughout Germany, looting and smashing the windows of Jewish-owned stores, setting fire to synagogues, killing and arresting Jews – all of it carefully stage-managed from the top. Thousands of Jewish males were hauled to concentration camps. Two days later, adding insult to injury, the Nazis imposed a stiff fine on -- the Jews, causing the financial ruin of thousands of Jewish families. Jews were banned from schools, from businesses, from movie houses and theaters, and told when and where they could appear in public.

Eventually, the list of activities forbidden to Jews would comprise the use of public transportation, swimming pools, parks and forests. Jews would not be allowed to possess driver's licenses, electric razors, or keep household pets. The list of proscribed items grew to include record players, typewriters, bicycles, heaters, vacuum cleaners, irons, cameras, radios, and other electrical appliances: all of which they had to surrender without compensation.

Crystal Night (*Kristallnacht*), as the November pogrom was subsequently named, marked the beginning of a new phase of Jewish persecution, a phase culminating in the "Final Solution", the cover-up name for the murder of 6 million defenseless Jewish men, women and children.

The Doors Are Closed

Not surprisingly, after Crystal Night nearly every Jew under German rule was desperate to leave Germany. The problem was there was no place to go. In a Depression-ridden world there were few countries willing to risk adding to their burdens by taking in penniless Jews, and the Germans made sure the Jews were penniless. Some countries were openly antisemitic. At the Evian Conference called in 1938 to deal with the Jewish refugee problem, thirty-two nations basically declared their unwillingness to open their doors to Jews. Australia said: "As we have no real racial problem, we are not desirous of importing one." New Zealand was unwilling to lift its restrictions. Britain declared its colonial empire off-limits. Canada wanted only agricultural workers; there

were not many of these among Germany's Jews. Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica and Panama said that they could accept no "traders or intellectuals." Holland, which had already accepted 25,000 Jewish refugees, asserted that it could do no more but offered the country as a temporary station. France declared that it had reached its saturation point: 200,000 refugees and 3 million aliens. Peru was against admitting doctors and lawyers. Venezuela bluntly stated that Jews were not welcome there. The U.S. offered, for the first time, to accept its full, legal quota of 27,370 immigrants annually from Germany and Austria -- hardly a generous gesture considering the country's size and resources. Sad to say, even this small quota had not been filled during 1933-1939, primarily because the State Department was opposed to taking in refugees.

Cartoon in the Daily Mirror, *June 6, 1939*

There was one place Jews could have been welcomed with open arms -- had the British been willing. That place was Palestine. Since the late nineteenth century thousands of Jews, escaping poverty and persecution, had sought a new life in what had once been their ancestral home. There they lived in a state of uneasy tension with the Arab population, punctuated by occasional bloody riots. Britain took charge of the area after World War I. In the thirties, bowing to Arab pressure and increasing violence between Arabs and Jews, the British ordered Jewish immigration into Palestine to be reduced to a mere trickle. An "open door policy" in Palestine could have saved millions of lives.

"Voyage of the Damned"

Nothing better captures the frustration attendant upon beating on doors that refuse to open than the voyage of the oceanliner *St. Louis*. From mid-May to mid-June 1939 this ship roamed the seas in a fruitless search for a haven for the 937 Jewish refugees on board. Seven hundred and thirty-four of these passenger held U.S. quota numbers, entitling them to enter the U.S.A. within three years. All held Cuban landing certificates. But when the *St. Louis* put in at Havana, only 22 refugees were allowed to land and the ship was ordered to leave Cuban territorial waters. On June 3, the State Department rejected a request that refugees with U.S. quota numbers be permitted to enter the U.S.A. On June 6, President Roosevelt received a telegram begging the U.S.A. to reconsider its refusal to admit the refugees. He did not reply. From June 6 through June 9 the

The St. Louis

St. Louis steamed back to Europe after Chile, Paraguay, Argentina and Colombia had turned down a request for asylum. On June 10, the U.S. Government issued a final no. The next day the German captain of the *St. Louis* considered beaching the ship on the English coast rather than return to Hamburg, the German city from which he had sailed four weeks earlier. Finally, on June 12-13, Britain, Holland, Belgium and France agreed to take the refugees. Except for the 288 who went to England, the 819 who found shelter in Europe came under German rule within 12 months, and many died as a result. The 288 refugees accepted by Britain were interned as "enemy aliens" a year after their admission. But they all survived the war.

Hitler Wins Big

Although Hitler's regime was immensely popular, not all Germans agreed with his handling of the "Jewish Question" or some of the other items on his political agenda. Most Germans, for instance, did not approve of or participate in the November pogrom, just as five years earlier they had been less than zealous about the Jewish boycott. By the same token, they tended not to see the horror of Nazi persecution. They seemed mesmerized by Hitler's stunning domestic and foreign policy triumphs.

For six years, until the outbreak of the war, Hitler broke one international agreement after another -- and got everything he wanted. He exploited to the hilt the feeling among many of the world's statesmen that Germany had been given a raw deal: that the Treaty of Versailles had been too harsh by far. Few neighboring countries, grappling with economic problems of their own, had the stomach to fight Hitler over some territory just because it happened to contain a sizeable number of ethnic Germans. None, for example, lifted a finger in 1938 to prevent Germany from absorbing Austria. In 1933, Germany withdrew from the League of Nations, the forerunner of today's United Nations. In 1935, he declared the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles void and announced Germany's return to general conscription. That same year he secured a naval agreement with Britain granting Germany the right to build as many submarines as her future adversary across the Channel. All this time of course Hitler talked of nothing but peace and international settlements.

The year after, Germany got to test some of its new weapons in an unlikely place: Spain. There, a civil war had broken out in 1936 when an army general named Francisco Franco led an insurrection against a newly-formed democratic government. The new government answered by arming the factory workers, and for a number of years their untrained militia successfully held off the professional soldiers. Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany sent military equipment to the rebels; Soviet Russia to the side of the government. Volunteers from many countries, including the U.S.A., came to Spain to fight the Spanish fascists. Ernest Hemingway wrote a popular novel about it (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*) and Pablo Picasso, the great Spanish painter, produced his masterpiece "Guernica", which commemorated the leveling of the Basque village of the same name by German planes. The civil war came to an end in 1939, with General Franco victorious.

Picasso's Guernica

Hitler's most resounding triumph in the prewar period, however, was his reoccupation of the Rhineland in 1936. Demilitarized under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, the French regarded the Rhineland as a buffer vital to her security. But when Hitler rolled his tanks into the area, France did nothing. Hitler had gambled and won; from then on he would be both insufferable and unstoppable. Germany again was the strongest military power in Europe.

Eager to settle Germany's grievances, the British were in no mood to protest either, arguing that it seemed perfectly reasonable for the Germans to go into their own backyard. That policy, known as "appeasement", was to leave a permanent stain on the career of Neville Chamberlain, England's Prime Minister from 1937 to 1940. "Appeasement" became one of dirtiest words in all of history.

Meanwhile, Hitler told his generals: "Germany's problems can only be solved by force." War was inevitable; Germany's army, air force, and industry would be ready for it by 1940 at the earliest, Hitler asserted. After 1945, it would be too late, he explained, because by then the balance of forces would run against Germany. He expected the war to be decided in a few weeks. Goering, head of the rearmament program, chimed in that Germans better get used to preferring guns to butter.

1938 was another memorable year for Hitler. When he seized Austria (where he was given a tumultuous welcome) the western powers did nothing except protest feebly on paper. No sooner had he swallowed Austria than Hitler started making threatening noises about Czechoslovakia, from which he demanded the area known as the Sudetenland. Populated chiefly by Germans, the Sudetenland contained the Czechoslovakian lines of fortifications. For months Europe teetered on the brink of war as both Russia and France had given Czechoslovakia guarantees to come to her defense if attacked by Germany. At the end of September, 1938, the leaders of the four great European powers -- France, Germany, England, Italy -- convened in Munich to decide Czechoslovakia's fate. Germany got her way, and conflict was averted. As Chamberlain put it: why risk "a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing?"

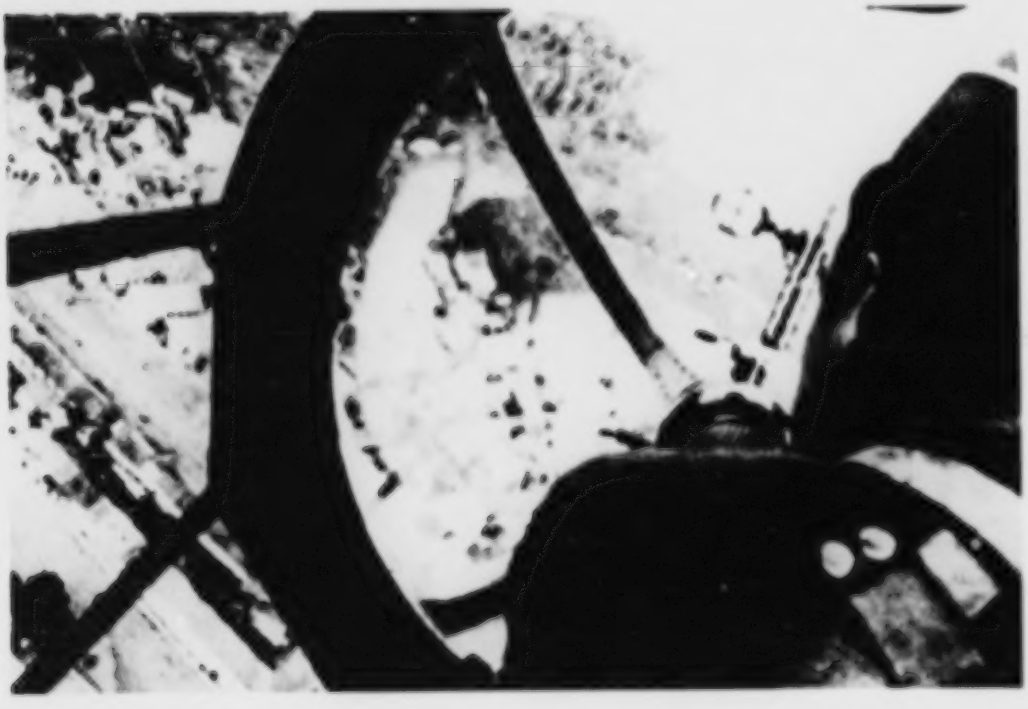
Neville Chamberlain: "Peace with Honor"

Though Chamberlain has been vilified for selling out to Hitler, people tend to forget that when the British Prime Minister returned from Munich he was hailed as the savior of Europe. Waving a copy of the agreement in the air, he happily informed a wildly cheering crowd that he had made "peace with honor. I believe it is peace in our time." Five months later Hitler's mechanized columns rolled into the Czech capital, Prague.

Britain and France Wake Up

The rape of Czechoslovakia proved to be a turning-point. Suddenly the scales dropped from people's eyes. Overnight the mood in Britain changed from appeasement to resistance. Chamberlain hurriedly extended guarantees to Poland and Rumania, and

France had to go along. Things were rapidly coming to a boiling-point. In May, 1939, Hitler concluded the so-called "Pact of Steel" with Italy's fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. Britain and France initiated talks with Russia aimed at forging an anti-German alliance. But even as the parties were negotiating, Hitler stunned the world with the announcement in August that Germany and Russia had signed a non-aggression pact. Once more the German Chancellor had trumped the Western powers.



September 1, 1939

Germany Invades Poland

The Nazi-Soviet Pact contained a secret clause defining Russian and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe and broadly hinted at the destruction of independent Poland. His eastern flank secured, Hitler was ready to invade his neighbor. To justify the attack, he staged a border incident and moaned about Polish "maltreatment of Germans": "The Polish nation," he declared, "refused my efforts for a peaceful regulation of neighborly relations; instead it has appealed to weapons. Germans in Poland are persecuted with a bloody terror and are driven from their homes. The series of border violations, which are unbearable to a great power, prove that the Poles no longer are willing to respect the German frontier. I order an end be put to this frantic activity, no other means is left to me now than to meet force with force."

On September 1, 1939, German troops slammed into Poland. Two days later, Britain and France declared war on Germany. The Second World War had begun.

WORLD WAR II

> **"This is not a question of fighting for Danzig or Poland. We are fighting to save the whole world from the pestilence of Nazi tyranny and in defense of all that is most sacred to man.... It is a war, viewed in its inherent quality, to establish, on impregnable rocks, the rights of the individual, and it is a way to establish and revive the stature of man.**
>
> **Winston Churchill to the House of Commons, September, 1939**

The Polish Campaign

The outcome in Poland was never in doubt. The Poles, on horseback and with under-equipped motorized forces, proved to be no match for the German tanks and their ferocious *Blitzkrieg* (lightning attack) tactics. Eleven days after the start of the Polish

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campaign, the American journalist O. D. Tolischus reported: "The Germans are . . . crushing Poland like a soft-boiled egg." In mid-September the Russians struck and occupied the eastern part of Poland, as provided for in the Nazi-Soviet alliance. In late September, Poland capitulated.

The "Phony War"

After the defeat of Poland, things suddenly got very quiet. France and Britain, though pledged to fight on the side of the Poles, merely looked on, each desperate to buy time to build up their forces. This so-called "phony war" ended abruptly in the spring of 1940, when the German army steamrolled across Denmark, Norway, and the Low Countries. On June 14 the Germans entered Paris. Four days before, Italy had entered the war on the side of Germany, "from a mistaken belief", as one cynical historian has put it, "that it was over." Now only Great Britain was left to fight the Germans.

Churchill and the Battle of Britain

But on the very day Hitler attacked the Low Countries, May 10, a momentous change took place in England. Neville Chamberlain resigned and was succeeded by Winston Churchill. An electrifying speaker, Churchill never wavered in his conviction that Germany would be defeated. It was Churchill who inspired the grit-your-teeth mentality that enabled the British to endure the second half of 1940 when German bombers relentlessly pounded their airfields, military installations, the capital and other cities. "Even though large tracts of Europe and many old famous states have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule," Churchill stated in one of his most celebrated speeches,

> "we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and the oceans, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it were subjugated, and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the new world, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old."

Defeated in the air, unable to break the morale of the ordinary citizen or to interrupt the production of war materials, the Germans were forced to shelve their invasion plans. The "Battle of Britain" -- the greatest air battle in human history -- was over. "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few", Churchill said in a memorable phrase of the heroics of the British pilots who had come away with a victory few people had thought possible. It was the first major setback to the German cause.

Churchill Woos the United States

Winston Churchill, 1944

But how long could Britain continue to fight on by herself? How long would she be able to hold out? Long enough, Churchill hoped, for the United States to enter the war against the Nazis. The American people were solidly pro-British even if the country was officially neutral, but few Americans expressed any great desire to become involved in what they considered to be a European affair. Yet it only seemed to be a matter of time before the U.S. would enter the war on the side of Britain. In the summer of 1940, Churchill wrote to Roosevelt requesting to be supplied with American destroyers "as a matter of life and death." On December 29, 1940, Roosevelt declared that it was the task of the United States to serve as "the arsenal of democracy." Three months later, the Congress passed the Lend-Lease Act, authorizing the President to supply war materials to any nation he considered to be vital to the security of the United States. That in turn was followed by the signing of the Atlantic Charter, in which Churchill and Roosevelt articulated their vision of the postwar peace: restoration of independence for all states forcibly deprived of it, and freedom and security and improved living standards for all peoples.

Roosevelt and Churchil on the deck of the Prince of Wales

The Swastika Flies Over Europe

At the time of the signing, in August 1941, of the Atlantic Charter practically all of Europe was in Hitler's clutches. Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria, coveting additional territory, had ranged themselves on the side of Germany. Yugoslavia had been conquered in one of those lightning-quick campaigns that was the hallmark of the German military. Italy, Germany's oldest ally, had attacked Greece but, facing defeat, had to be bailed out by her senior partner before Greece could be defeated. Across the Mediterranean, General

Erwin Rommel, the Desert Fox, had driven the British back to the Egyptian frontier. The entire Middle and Near East seemed ready to fall to the Germans.

Hitler's Big Error

But now Hitler committed his greatest blunder of the war: he invaded Russia. Conquering Russia had always been his dream of dreams. He thought of Russia as "our India" and coveted its wide open spaces for the German people; its possession would lead to control of both Europe and Asia. And with most of Europe safely conquered, Britain down but not out, he believed the hour had struck to make his dream come true. "The German army must be prepared to crush Soviet Russia in a quick campaign before the end of the war against England," Hitler announced at the end of 1940. On June 22, 1941, he invaded Soviet Russia.

Initially, Russia seemed to be just another Poland. By October, having reached the outskirts of Moscow and Leningrad, the German troops were set to administer the final blow. But when the final blow came it was parried. Winter set in early, resistance stiffened, Stalin was in the capital -- the Germans were checked before Moscow. There would be no quick victory in Russia.

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The United States Enters the War

While the German army was freezing outside Moscow, the Japanese sneak-attacked the American fleet riding at anchor at Pearl Harbor and reduced it to a twisted heap of smoldering metal. The day after, on December 8, 1941, the U.S. formally declared war on Japan. Three days later Germany and Italy joined Japan in fighting the Americans. Britain had its wish.

Total War

Now the war was global. It also had become total, the needs of war sweeping everything before it. Never before had societies been so controlled and regulated from above. This was less true, of course, of the United States with its vast resources and geographical remoteness from the European and Asian theaters of war. Britain, however, had to strain every muscle to keep going. Food and clothes were rationed and, in the interest of morale, profits were limited. All men between 18 and 50 and women between 20 and 30 were pressed into the war effort, performing either civilian or military service. In the final year of the war the conscription of women was extended to age 50, popularly known as the "grandmother category."

This was nothing compared to Russia, which mobilized all men from 16-55 and all women from 16-45. The devastating material and physical losses sustained by the Russians at the outset of the German campaign compelled them to force all life into a straitjacket, going beyond anything previously attempted in a country where centralization had become a way of life.

The greatest transformation, however, took place in Germany. The heart of German offensive strategy was the *Blitzkrieg*: quick victory, quick replacement of material losses (much of it to be taken from the enemy), followed by a partial demobilization after each victory. The failure of a quick victory in Russia demonstrated the limitations of this strategy by triggering a number of unanticipated problems. Now supplies and equipment had to be produced at a constant pace, necessitating a total mobilization of resources and tight central planning. This was done brilliantly under Albert Speer, Hitler's favorite architect and head of the Ministry of Armaments and Production -- but by utilizing conquered peoples as slave labor. In contrast to Russia, Britain, and the United States, German women were not expected to fill the gap left by the fighting men (much of the slack was taken up by "importing" foreign workers and by the use of prisoners of war). After all, the principal function of the German woman was to have as many babies as possible. Incredible as it may seem considering the war situation, Hitler could not be made to budge from this position.

The Battle of Stalingrad

1942 was a crucial year on both sides of the conflict. While Japan was piling victory upon victory in the Far East, taking the Philippines from the Americans, overrunning the Malay Peninsula and conquering the Dutch East Indies, the German forces in Russia

Soviet soldiers in the battle of Stalingrad

during the summer were embarking on a campaign they hoped would seal Russia's fate. Instead, it sealed Germany's. After advancing south for months almost unopposed, the German army suddenly ran into a wall at Stalingrad, the city on the Volga which Stalin had ordered to be held at all cost. The battle of Stalingrad, one of the most bitter of the entire war, raged for months, but the combination of an aroused citizenry and the unforgiving Russian winter proved to be too much. Having seen his forces dwindle from 300,000 to 120,000 in the space of four months, German Field Marshal von Paulus ignored Hitler's order to keep on fighting and capitulated to the Russians on the last day of January, 1943. Hitler was beside himself, fuming that Paulus should have committed suicide rather than surrender.

The Battle of Stalingrad not only forced Germany to abandon southern Russia but also destroyed the myth of German military invincibility. More than a battle, at Stalingrad Germany lost the war.

The Tide Turns Some More

Late in 1942, a decisive battle took place in the Mediterranean as well. The Battle of El Alamein produced the first victory of British troops over a German army in the Second World War. Shortly thereafter, a combined force of British and American troops under General Dwight D. Eisenhower surprised the Germans by invading French North Africa. Italy was knocked out of the war by mid-1943; by then the question no longer was whether Germany would lose the war but when.

The Nazis Rule

A major goal of the Germans was to exploit the conquered countries for the benefit of the German economy. They stripped the occupied countries of essential foodstuffs and shipped them to Germany; the same was true of raw materials. Able-bodied men were

> **"We did not cross our frontiers in order to subdue other peoples in blind madness for conquest. . . . We came as the heralds of a New Order and a new justice."**
>
> **German newspaper editor, 1944**

forced to work in labor batallions or taken to Germany. In 1943, German industry and agriculture employed 6 million foreigners, mostly civilians and prisoners of war. In addition, the occupiers recruited young men into special SS units to fight the Russians in the East.

A second objective was to secure "living space" -- *Lebensraum* -- in the East for German colonization and Germanization. The eastern areas were to be cleared of their indigenous populations in order to make room for German settlers. SS-leader Heinrich Himmler foresaw the need of destroying perhaps as many as 30 million Slavs to realize this end. If allowed to remain at all, local populations were to provide a source of cheap labor. "Our duty in the East," stated Himmler in 1942, "is not Germanization in the former sense of the term, that is, imposing German language and laws upon the population, but to ensure that only people of pure German blood inhabit the East."

German soldiers pose before hanged Poles

The annexed provinces of Poland were completely purged of their political and social elite -- professional men, large landowners and businessmen. Many were shot. Polish schools and most churches were forced to shut down. It would be enough, declared Heinrich Himmler in a 1940 memorandum, to provide children of the non-German population of the East with education no higher than fourth grade: "Simple arithmetic up to no more than 500; writing one's name; the lesson that it is a divine command to be

obedient to the Germans, and to be honest, hard-working, and good. I do not think that reading is required." Priests, Hitler said in 1940, must assume the duty of keeping the Poles "quiet, stupid and backward." Poles were not allowed to enter the professions. Polish males under 28 and females below 25 were forbidden to marry. Poles were paid starvation wages. Food was strictly rationed. When a German field marshal protested that the Nazi methods in Poland made him ashamed of being a German, Hitler retorted: "Wars are not won with methods of the Salvation Army." Upon the invasion of Russia, Hitler said: "This is a war of extermination." All Soviet officials seized by the Germans were shot out of hand. Two million of the five million Soviet soldiers captured by the Germans were murdered in captivity; another million were never accounted for. Nazi racial policy justified their destruction: Propaganda Minister Goebbels observed in his diary, the Russians "are not people, but a conglomeration of animals." Some months after the invasion of the USSR, a Nazi official in the Ukraine inquired plaintively: "If we shoot Jews, liquidate the war prisoners, starve the major part of the big cities' population, and in the coming year reduce also a part of the peasants through famine there will arise a question: Who is going to produce the economic goods?" The Nazi leadership was not concerned about that: race considerations came first.

Resistance

The Allies encouraged what Churchill called "ungentlemanly warfare", that is, subversion and sabotage. But organized resistance to the German rule was slow to develop and only started gaining momentum when Germany began losing the war. Resisters, small in number and animated by different political and religious beliefs, extended help and protection to the persecuted, transmitted intelligence about German military movements, secretly printed pamphlets and broadsheets to boost the morale of the occupied, and carried out acts of sabotage. Partisan groups sprang up in the forests and swamps of Russia and in the rugged mountain areas of Yugoslavia, fighting German troops and cutting lines of communications.

Members of the French resistance operating a clandestine press

Countering Resistance

It was German policy to put down with utter savagery all resistance. For instance, when Security Police Leader Reinhard Heydrich was assassinated in Czechoslovakia, the retaliation

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consisted of executing the entire male population of the village of Lidice, placing the women in camps, and dispersing the children. A similar brutal punishment was meted out to the French village of Oradour, whose population was suspected of supporting partisan activities. After shooting the men of the village, the Germans herded the women and children into a church, which they then set on fire and burned to the ground.

Killing Hitler

Germany's sagging war fortunes almost cost Hitler his life. On July 20, 1944, a bomb planted by a German army officer went off during a staff conference at Hitler's headquarters in East Prussia. Hitler escaped with minor injuries. The plotters were seized and strangled with piano wire and suspended by their feet from meathooks. The whole thing was filmed and shown to Hitler who was reported to have watched it all with undisguised glee.

World War II Ends

But Hitler had good reason to be worried. In 1944, the Allies were rolling up victory after victory and closing in on Germany from the south, east and west. On June 6, 1944 – D-Day – Allied troops crossed the English Channel and landed on the Normandy coast. Advancing on a broad front, the Allies pushed the Germans further and further back. In December, Germany mounted a last-ditch effort to avert the inevitable, but to no avail. By the end of February, 1945, the Russians were only 50 miles from Berlin. There was no longer any place for the Germans to retreat to. On April 26, Russian and Allied forces met at the Elbe River. Four days later, with Russian troops about to enter Berlin, Hitler committed suicide, taking Eva Braun, his new bride, with him. A week later Germany surrendered.

June 6, 1944, D-Day. American and British troops wade ashore in Normandy, France

The final reckoning was also around the corner for Japan. The end of the war in Europe permitted the British and the Americans to focus all their energies on defeating Japan. Before long, the British under Lord Mountbatten reconquered Burma and a great naval victory of the Americans in the gulf of the central

Philippine island of Leyte eliminated the Japanese navy as a factor of military importance. Superiority in the air gave the Americans free reign in bombing the cities of Japan. The dropping of two atomic bombs, on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, on August 6 and 8, was the final blow that brought Japan to its knees. The bombs devastated these cities, killed 130,000 civilians and injured an equal number. Japan surrendered on August 14. The Second World War was at an end.

Nuclear warfare

II. THE HOLOCAUST

> **"We are in the presence of a crime without name."**
> **Winston Churchill, August 1941**

The Shock of Liberation

In the first week of April, 1945, U.S. General Dwight D. Eisenhower visited a former German forced labor camp in which thousands of Jews and Russian POWs had been killed or worked to death. The professional soldier, veteran of many battles, could hardly believe his eyes. Shocked and outraged, he telephoned Churchill and sent him photographs of the emaciated corpses he had seen.

A week later, when British troops entered Bergen-Belsen concentration camp they found 10,000 unburied bodies. Anne Frank had died there only weeks before, and her body could have been among them. The living appeared to be not much better off: "Men and women, clad in rags," Colonel Gerald Draper recalled, "and barely able to move from starvation and typhus, lay in their straw bunks in every state of filth and degradation. The dead and dying could not be distinguished." Another Englishman reported: "Belsen is a living death, an example of Nazi methods, the best indictment of their government one could ever find, and if it is ever necessary, an undoubted answer to those who want to know what we have been fighting for."

Two weeks later American troops entered Dachau, the Nazis' first concentration camp, established shortly after Hitler came to power in 1933. A journalist wrote: "On a railway siding there is a train of fifty wagons -- all full of terribly emaciated dead bodies, piled up like the twisted branches of cut-down trees."

And so it went. Every liberated camp and subcamp yielded a gruesome inventory of ashes, bleached bones and walking skeletons.

The Victims

Between 1939 and 1945 the Germans killed as many as 20 million civilians. Among the murdered were a quarter of a million gypsies; tens of thousands of homosexuals; the entire Polish intellectual class and leadership; Soviet intellectuals; so-called "useless eaters" (the mentally ill, schizophrenics, epileptics, and other forms of life deemed "unworthy of life"), and 6 million Jews.

All these were casualties not of war but of discrimination. But among them there was only one group that was hunted to the ends of the earth and targeted for complete annihilation. The little Polish or Ukrainian boy with the Aryan features could be taken away from his parents and spirited to Germany under a special program to preserve valuable "northern racial stock." The homosexual or the religious or political opponent might be set free after undergoing successful "re-education" in a concentration camp. The program designed to weed out the "useless eaters" was stopped after strong protests, principally from the German clergy. No way of escape was open to Jews. Jews were to be destroyed, root and branch. Every man, woman and child. As Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, a chicken farmer turned executioner, put it: "Jews are the eternal enemies of the German people and must be exterminated."

Germany Declares War on the Jews

On the day Germany invaded Poland, September 1, 1939, Hitler went out of his way to repeat a threat he had made seven months earlier. "I have often in my life been a prophet," he declared on January 30 before the assembled Reichstag, "and usually people laughed at me. . . . Let me be a prophet again today: If international financial Jewry, in

Europe and beyond, should succeed in plunging the nations into another world war, the result will not be the Bolshevization of the world and thus the victory of Jewry, but the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe."

It was Hitler, of course, who plunged the world into war; Hitler who ordered the invasion of Poland; Hitler who plotted and decreed the murder of tens of millions of people; Hitler who mesmerized his followers into blindly following his leadership. And Hitler who was responsible for the destruction of European Jewry.

A New Style of Crime -- A Machinery of Death

It was not easy to kill 6 million people. The murder of the Jews was organized by the government and involved millions of people: civil servants, policemen, railway personnel, industrialists, soldiers, generals, criminals, physicians, professors -- in short, a cross-section of society. It was a step-by-step operation, a gigantic administrative task, with those at the top generating the orders, those in the middle casting the orders into directives, and those at the bottom programmed to pull the trigger.

The "Final Solution"

Until the outbreak of the war, the Nazis tried to get rid of the Jews by putting pressure on them to emigrate; in other words, to expel them. More than half the Jews of Germany, roughly 250,000, succeeded in leaving, despite the fact that there were few nations that would accept them as immigrants -- at least not in the plucked condition in which the Nazis sent them on their way. With the outbreak of war, however, it became virtually impossible to leave. For a while the Nazi leadership, casting about for answers as to what to do with the millions of Jews who had fallen into their hands, toyed with the idea of establishing a "Jewish reservation" in southeastern Poland and of "evacuating" them to the island of Madagascar off the coast of Africa.

But with the decision to kill all the Jews, taken some time in the spring of 1941, and Hitler's order in the fall to close off all avenues of emigration, the Jews of Nazi-occupied Europe became sitting ducks for the Nazi executioners. Significantly, no written order

seems to have been given for what the Nazis referred to as "the final solution of the Jewish question," the attempted murder of Europe's 11 million Jews (a number that included Jews in England, Switzerland, Sweden, Ireland -- countries Hitler evidently expected to conquer in due course). But in a tyranny such as Hitler's Germany, a verbal order was enough to set the process in motion. That was how the Nazi euthanasia program -- "mercy killing" -- came into being, for example. A brief letter from Hitler to the head of his chancellery and to his personal physician had provided the legal basis for it.

Reinhard Heydrich

First Measures in Poland

On September 21, 1939, a week before Poland surrendered to the German invaders, Reinhard Heydrich, chief of the German Security Police and Security Service, sent out a detailed plan to his special killer commandos (*Einsatzgruppen*) operating in Poland behind the advancing German army. Jews were to be collected "in as few concentration points as possible," instructed the police chief, "so as to facilitate subsequent measures . . . in cities which are rail junctions, or at least are located along railroad lines . . . ." He also directed that in every community with a substantial number of Jews a council of Jewish elders composed of influential persons and rabbis be set up to help "evacuate" the Jews from the countryside.

The Ghettos

The "concentration points" were actually ghettos, many of them completely sealed off from the world. The first ghetto in the occupied areas of Poland was established in the town of Piotrkow in October 1939. Jacob Birnbaum, a surviving witness, has left an account of the terror unleashed by the Germans after they entered the town. Birnbaum relates that the Germans shot the first twenty Jews they saw and set fire to entire streets in the Jewish quarter and then killed the occupants as they came running out of their burning homes. Birnbaum's account continues:

> They stole everything they feasibly could -- clothes, linen, furs, carpets, valuable books. They often invited the Poles on the streets to take part in the looting, after which they would fire bullets into the air in order to

give the impression that they were driving away the Polish 'thieves.' These scenes were photographed by the Germans to demonstrate for all that they were protecting Jewish property from Polish criminals. Jews, many of them elderly, were kidnapped and sent to forced labor camps where they were tortured and beaten. . . One common insult suffered by the Jews during the early days under the new regime was their being chased away or beaten as they tried to wait in line for food together with other citizens. All Jews who attempted to resist were gunned down immediately.

The "Yellow Star"

In November 1939 Hans Frank, governor of German-occupied central Poland, decreed that all Jews over the age of nine throughout his domain had to wear a four-inch white arm band marked with the "star of Zion on the right sleeve of their inner and outer clothing." In Warsaw, the star had to be blue. Similar markings were placed on Jewish homes and shops. Birnbaum recalled that in Piotrkow the badge was yellow, bore the inscription *Jude* (Jew), and had to be worn on the right forearm. "Anyone found without such a badge faced death."

Within a year all Jews under German rule in Poland were confined in ghettos. Ghettos of this type had not existed since the Middle Ages. Conditions in these ghettos beggar description. All were overcrowded and gripped by hunger and disease. In the Warsaw ghetto, into which were crammed some half a million Jews, 50,000 died of starvation in 1941.

Normal existence was a thing of the past. A thirteen-year-old Polish-Jewish boy recorded the disruption of his life in his diary on August 12, 1940: "All through the war I've been studying at home by myself. When I think of how I used to go to school I feel like bursting into tears, and today I must stay at home and can't go anywhere. And when I think of how many wars there are going on in the world, how many men are daily dying by bullets, by gassing, by bombs, by epidemics and other enemies of man, then I feel fit for nothing." On November 1, 1941, he wrote: "Today notices were put up in Kielce [Poland] that anyone who goes in and out of the 'Jewish Quarter' will receive the death penalty. Up till now people could go in and out of the Quarter, This news made me very sad, not myself but every Israelite who heard it. These notices were not only put

up in Kielce but in all towns under the 'Generalgouvernement' (that's the name of the area which used to be Poland)."

Nazi terror knew no bounds. Chaim Kaplan, who kept a diary in Warsaw, reported the incident, one among many, of a rabbi in Lodz who was forced to spit on a scroll of law. "In fear of his life," related Kaplan, "he complied and desecrated that which is holy to him and to his people. After a short while he had no more saliva, his mouth was dry. To the Nazi's question, why did he stop spitting, the rabbi replied that his mouth was dry. Then the son of the 'superior race' began to spit into the rabbi's open mouth, and the rabbi continued to spit on the Torah."

SKETCHES OF GHETTO LIFE: A Man With An Onion

In every street of the ghetto the same scene is played: a visibly ill old man or a frail boy crouches in a doorway holding two or three onion plants in his hand. The young plants, as consumptive as their vendors, have had to give their lives prematurely. A tiny onion, a tender little plant with a narrow root -- one cannot really call it an onion; a narrow stalk, wilting in the hand of its hawker, 1.50 for a tiny onion. It could have lived, that tiny onion! But even money has become scarce in the ghetto, and onions are a rare item. The short, emaciated man, the delicate boy in the doorway will not have brilliant careers like the little newsboy in New York, who, perhaps, started with one copy of the newspaper and ended up owning a publishing concern.

From *The Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto*

In the Ghetto: Life Goes On

Despite everything, Jews somehow managed to carry on. Forbidden to open schools, they established secret ones. Diarists and chroniclers, animated by an apparently irrepressible urge to register their impressions for posterity, busied themselves recording the terrible events into which fate had plunged them. Jews gave concerts, lectures, and theater performances. They organized clandestine archives, welfare institutions and mutual aid societies. Newspapers published on the sly. Young people again became active in the various youth groups. Even humor was not absent. Chroniclers in Lodz reported that the following analysis of the workshop soup had been circulating for several days:

Quantity -- under 0.7 liters:

Color - Bluish; Aroma - Horse Stable; Clarity - Very Murky; Taste - Sour to Bitter; Protein - None; Sugar - None; Fat - None; Peas - Isolated Sightings; Groats - Traces; Water - 80 Percent; Soda - 15 Percent: Effect: DIURETIC.

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Wedding in Lodz Ghetto

Heinrich Himmler

"Once and For All"

Hard as life was in the ghetto, the worst was yet to come. With nearly all of Europe locked in the German vise and the Russian campaign in full swing and seemingly headed for victory there as well, Hitler decided to "settle" the so-called "Jewish Question" "once and for all." With the invasion of Russia the obstacles and considerations that had once stood in the way of carrying out his plan to murder all Jews -- world opinion, a possible peace with England, even opposition inside Germany -- were overcome or brushed aside as irrelevant. "All Jews," Himmler told his chief executioner, Rudolf Hoess, "within our grasp are to be destroyed without exception, now, during the war. If we do not succeed in destroying the biological substance of the Jews, the Jews will some day destroy the German people!"

On July 31, 1941, Reich Marshal Goering, after Hitler the most powerful man in Germany, wrote to Reinhard Heydrich:

"Complementing the task already assigned to you in the decree of January 24, 1939, to undertake, by emigration or evacuation, a solution of the Jewish question as advantageous as possible under the conditions at the time, I hereby charge you with making all necessary organizational, functional, and material preparations for the complete solution of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence.

In so far as the jurisdiction of other central agencies may be touched thereby, they are to be involved.

I charge you furthermore with submitting to me in the near future an overall plan of the organizational, functional, and material measures to be taken in preparing for the implementation of the aspired final solution of the Jewish question."

Hermann Goering

The Wannsee Conference

The "organizational, functional, and material measures" to which Goering referred were fleshed out at a conference held in a spacious villa in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee on January 20, 1942. As butlers circulated dispensing cognac, 15 key representatives of the Nazi governing apparatus discussed ways of streamlining the killing operation. Jews were to be brought to the East "for use as labor – "road building," to be precise – Heydrich informed those present, adding that in the course of this "undoubtedly a large part will fall away through natural diminution." Those able to survive all this," being the toughest and therefore most capable of resistance, he continued, "will have to be dealt with accordingly." The police leader emphasized that these actions were to be regarded as merely provisional – "in view of the coming final solution of the Jewish question."

Site of the Wannsee Conference

Adolf Eichmann, who attended the conference and took minutes, later recalled that means of extermination and systems of killing were discussed "quite bluntly, quite differently from the language which I had to use later in the record." Eichmann headed the office in Heydrich's ministry which dealt with "Evacuations and Jews" and thus was responsible for organizing the deportations to the death camps. Eichmann was captured in Brazil in 1960 and put on trial in Jerusalem. Sentenced to death, he died on the gallows on May 31, 1962.

Open-Air Murders

In fact, by the time the murder of the Jews was being structured into formal directives the mass killing of Jews was already well on the way, but with methods -- shooting, beating, starving, torturing -- that were considered to be too expensive, too inefficient, too time-consuming, too public, and too messy. Shooting, for example, might be upsetting to the individual pulling the trigger. Close to a million Jews were killed by the *Einsatzgruppen* alone. "The implementation of such actions", wrote SS-Colonel Jaeger to his superiors about the activities of his men in the area around Minsk during December of 1941,

> "is in the first instance an organizational problem. The decision to free each district of Jews necessitated thorough preparation of each action as well as acquisition of information about local conditions. The Jews had to be collected in one or more towns and a ditch had to be dug at the right site for the right number. The marching distance from collecting points to the ditches averaged about 3 miles. The Jews were brought in groups of 500, separated by at least 1.2 miles, to the place of execution. The sort of difficulties and nerve-scraping work involved in all this is shown by an arbitrarily chosen example:
>
> In Rokiskis 3208 people had to be transported 3 miles before they could be liquidated. To manage this job in a 24-hour period, more than 60 of the 80 available Lithuanian partisans had to be detailed to the cordon. The Lithuanians who were left were frequently being relieved while doing the work together with my men.
>
> Vehicles are seldom available. Escapes, which were attempted here and there, were frustrated solely by my men at the risk of their lives. For example, 3 men of the Commando at Mariampole shot 38 escaping Jews and communist functionaries on a path in the woods, so that no one got away. Distances to and from actions were never less than 90-120 miles. Only careful planning enabled the Commando to carry out up to 5 actions a week and at the same time continue the work in Kovno without interruption.

Kovno itself, where trained Lithuanian partisans were available in sufficient number, was comparatively speaking, a shooting paradise.

All officers and men of the Commando in Kovno participated in the major actions in the city. Only one intelligence official was excused because of illness.

I regard the Jewish actions of Strike Commando 3 as virtually completed. The remaining work Jews and Jewesses are urgently needed, and I can imagine that they will still be needed after the winter. I am of the opinion that the male work Jews should be sterilized immediately to prevent any procreation. A Jewess who nevertheless becomes pregnant is to be liquidated. . . ."

Enter: Gas Vans

So it had not been easy "to free each district of Jews." But help was on the way; some of Germany's best minds were considering ways to make the killing process more manageable. Thus, in September, 1941, the Germans experimented with Zyklon B gas, which they used to kill 600 Russian prisoners of war. That experiment took place in a concentration camp near the Polish town of Auschwitz. Three months later, thousands of Jews were gassed by carbon monoxide in Chelmno, also in Poland. The instrument of death was a hermetically sealed, specially constructed van made to look like an ordinary trailer. With the engines running a hose from the exhaust pipe was fed into the interior of the back part. The victims died shortly thereafter.

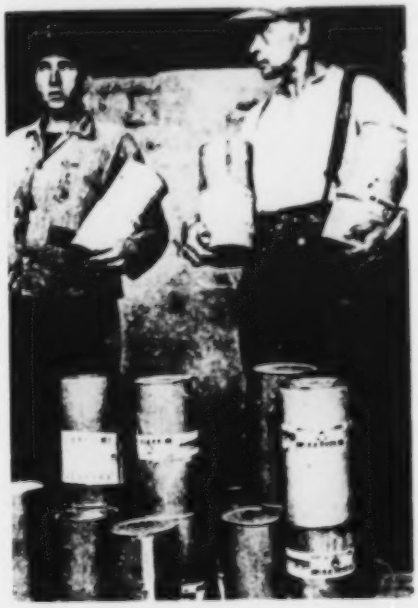
"My Honor is Called Loyalty" – SS Motto

Rudolf Hoess, the commander of Auschwitz from 1940 to the end of 1943, recalled being told in the summer of 1941 that Hitler had ordered the extermination of the Jews and that Auschwitz had been selected to play a key role in their destruction, in part "because the area can easily be isolated and camouflaged." Where to do the gassing? "We inspected," Hoess continued in his autobiography, "the area in order to choose a

Rudolf Hoess

likely spot. We decided that a peasant farmstead situated in the northwest corner . . . would be the most suitable. It was isolated and screened by woods and hedges, and it was also not far from the railroad. About 800 people at the time could be killed." "The buildings," Hoess further recalled, "were to be screened from view by a wall or hedges. Lack of material prevented this from being done as a temporary measure, all extermination buildings were hidden under camouflage nets."

The gas used to kill the Jews was the gas that had been successfully tried out on the Russian POWs. Zyklon B, hydrogen cyanide, killed its victims quickly and "cleanly," unlike carbon monoxide. "There was no noticeable change in the bodies and no sign of convulsions or discoloration," Hoess later affirmed. Zyklon, stored in small cans, consisted of bluish pellets which turned into gas when they were poured through an aperture into a chamber. The gas was manufactured by the Dessauer Works for Sugar and Chemical Industry and distributed by the German Corporation for Combating Vermin. Two crematoria, built by the firm of Topf and Sons, could cremate about 2,000 bodies in less than 24 hours, according to Hoess. The bodies were taken to the ovens on the floor above by means of an elevator.



Men carrying cans of Zyklon B crystals. Each container holds enough poison to kill 2,000 to 3,000 person

Topf and Sons also installed crematoria in other death camps in Poland, such as Belzec, Sobibor, and Chelmno. Unlike Auschwitz, which was also used as a labor camp, the only "labor" being performed in these camps -- all in Poland -- was that of killing. Every Jew that entered a camp like that was immediately put to death.

The majority of Jews liquidated in these camps were Polish Jews, of whom there were more than 3 million on the eve of the Nazi invasion. As the construction of the gas chambers neared completion, the true purpose of the hundreds of Jewish ghettos in Poland became clear. They served as a funnel to the gas chambers and the crematoria. Jacob Birnbaum recalled how this was done in Piotrkow:

"By 2:00 a.m. the Ukrainian SS police together with the "navy blue" Polish police had surrounded the ghetto. In the dark hours before dawn, the first shots were heard as the German SS entered the Ghetto and chased the terrified Jews from their homes toward the assembly point. Those assembled on the square were arranged in two columns. The right column was to wait for a future selection (these were mainly individuals who worked in German firms and who carried "good" worker cards stamped with a swastika), while the left column was destined for the deportation to Treblinka. Many families were broken up: Children were torn away from their mothers and wives from their husbands, The cries and screams of the children were silenced by the Germans with kicks from their boots or blows from their whips.

Often parents or children who qualified for the "right" column shifted over to the other group in order to go to their deaths together with their families.

The principal death camps in Poland

The children from the orphanage were deported together with the orphanage staff. In the presence of the Gestapo the Ukrainians walked between the rows of assembled Jews, emptying their pockets of everything they found. So many Jews were forcefully deported that the "Action" required eight days. It was completed on Wednesday, October 21. Five thousand Jews were deported to Treblinka every other day, squeezed into fully packed freight-cars with 150 people in each. Before the Jews entered the cars, they were ordered by the Germans to remove their clothing and shoes. Old, sick, or weakened people were shot on the spot and dead bodies were strewn out along the whole route. In total, over 20,000 Jews were deported, including many from outside of Piotrkow. The Jews who were shot during the deportation, most of them old or sick, numbered roughly 1,000."

An example of the terrible "efficiency" of these death camps is that of the 600,000 Jews deported to Belzec, a camp much like Treblinka, only two survived; the rest were gassed. One of these recalled what happened to him and his fellow Jews.

> We were entrained and taken to Belzec. The train entered a small forest. Then, the entire crew of the train was changed. SS men from the death camp replaced the railroad employees. We were not aware of this at that time. The train entered the camp. Other SS men took us off the train. They led us all together -- women, men, children -- to a barrack.

Gas chamber

Crematorium

We were told to undress before we go to the bath. I understood immediately what that meant. After undressing we were told to form two groups, one of men and the other of women with children. An SS man, with the strike of a horsewhip, sent the men to the right or to the left, to death – to work. . . .

We, who were selected for work, were told to dress. I and some other men were appointed to take the people to the kiln. I was sent with the women. The Ukrainian Schmidt, an Ethnic German, was standing at the entrance to the gas-chamber and hitting with a knout every entering woman. Before the door was closed, he fired a few shots from his revolver and then the door closed automatically and forty minutes later we went in and carried the bodies out to a special ramp. We shaved the hair of the bodies, which were afterwards packed into sacks and taken away by Germans.

The children were thrown into the chamber simply on the women's heads. In one of the 'transports' taken out of the gas chamber, I found the body of my wife and I had to shave her hair.

Life and Death in Auschwitz

The concentration camps established by the Nazis had three purposes: work, the elimination of political adversaries, and the extermination of "inferior races." Auschwitz combined all three. For more than two years Jews from nearly every country in Europe poured into Auschwitz by the hundreds of thousands. Transported by rail, packed tight as sardines in cattle cars, they came from Amsterdam and from Paris, from Salonika and Budapest, from Brussels and Prague, from Belgrade, Vienna and Rome; and from transit

camps and ghettos spread across the map of Europe. Rudolf Hoess estimated the number of Jews killed in Auschwitz at 2.5 million.

There are no words in any language to describe the suffering that went on in a camp like Auschwitz. After a grueling trainride in a cattle car that could take as much as a week or ten days, the deportees would disembark to a volley of shouts, curses, blows, and barking police dogs. Prisoners in striped uniforms -- Jews -- stood off to the side waiting to unload their belongings. These Jews had been instructed, on pain of death, not to breathe a word about what went on in this camp. Quickly, the new arrivals were sorted into two groups, men on one side, women and small children on the other. They were now ready for the "selection." That is, a decision would be made by some "qualified" Nazi official, usually a physician, as to who would live and who would die. A flick of the wrist would send those judged fit to work to the left -- to life: healthy men, grown boys, and young women without children. A flick in the opposite direction would send the rest to the right -- to die in the gas chambers: old people and women with small children. Rudolf Hoess described what happened next.

> Jews selected for gassing were taken as quickly as possible to the crematoriums, the men being separated from the women. In the undressing rooms, prisoners of the Special Detachment, detailed for this purpose, would tell them in their own language that they were going to be bathed and deloused, that they must leave their clothes neatly together and above all remember where they had put them, so that they would be able to find them again quickly after the delousing. The prisoners of the Special Detachment had the greatest interest in seeing that the operation proceeded smoothly and quickly. After undressing, the Jews went into the gas chambers, which were furnished with showers and water pipes and gave a realistic impression of a bathhouse.
>
> The women went first with their children, followed by the men who were always the fewer in number. This part of the operation nearly always went smoothly, for the prisoners of the Special Detachment would calm those who betrayed any anxiety or who perhaps had some inkling of their fate. As an additional precaution these prisoners of the Special Detachment and an SS man always remained until the last moment. . . .

The door would now be quickly screwed up and the gas immediately discharged . . . through vents in the ceilings of the gas chambers . . . in a few minutes all lay still.

Selection in Auschwitz

Special Detachments

The chief function of the Special Detachments mentioned by Hoess was to remove the corpses from the gas chamber and to burn them in the crematoria. The members of the Special Detachments were Jews, and they too were threatened with death should they inform the victims of the truth behind the "bathhouses." Just the same, the Special Detachments were routinely liquidated: they knew too much.

The Inmates

The Jews who made it past the selection on the station platform were brought inside the camp. A prisoner shaved their heads, another prisoner tattooed a number on their left arm, and a third handed them a striped uniform. Then they were assigned to their barracks, where they shared a tiny wooden bunk with two other inmates.

At the start of every day and regardless of the weather, under a baking sun or in driving snow, there were endless rollcalls. After rollcall, during which inmates had to stand at attention, sometimes for hours at the time, a band playing martial music saw the inmates off to various work-sites. A portion would be sent to the factories German industry, taking advantage of Auschwitz's limitless supply of slaves, had set up around the camp; the rest would be detailed to camp-related jobs supervised either by the SS or by fellow prisoners, not necessarily less brutal, who seemed to derive their greatest pleasure from beating their charges whenever they felt the urge, which was often. Upon their return from work, there would be another rollcall. Add to these torments the bowl of watery soup, the crust of bread and the sliver of margarine that was the daily fare in Auschwitz, the constant "selections" and the ever-present specter of disease -- add all of it and it no longer surprises that the average "lifespan" of a "camp generation" was three months.

Freezing "experiment"

But there was more to Auschwitz than killing and work. Oblivious to the Hippocratic oath, which every doctor must take, German physicians treated the camp as a vast laboratory in which to play out their most lurid medical fantasies. Among the "medical experiments" they performed on the inmates were sterilization by injection and castration by X-ray. The infamous Dr. Mengele used twins as guinea pigs in pursuit of a long-held dream to discover a method for increasing the Aryan "race." He also boiled Jews in hot water in order to facilitate the separation of the flesh from the bones. The skeletons were then sent to the Anthropological Museum in Berlin.

The Death March

In January, 1945, with the Russians drawing near, the SS hurriedly collected Auschwitz's remaining prisoners, both Jews and non-Jews, and set out on the notorious "Death March." Thousands judged too weak to march were shot prior to leaving. It was the dead of winter and it never ceased snowing. Whoever so much as stumbled provoked an SS bullet. Final destination was the hundreds of camps located in the interior of Germany. A teenage boy named Elie Wiesel was among the marchers. Years after, he described what it was like:

> We were given no food. We lived on snow; it took the place of bread. The days were like nights, and the nights left the dregs of their darkness in our souls. The train [after days of marching, a train consisting of open cattle wagons took the prisoners the rest of the way] was traveling slowly, often stopping for several hours and then setting off again. It never ceased snowing. All through these days and nights we stayed crouching, one on top of the other, never speaking a word. We were no more than frozen bodies. Our eyes closed, we waited merely for the next stop so that we could unload our dead.

> Ten days, ten nights of traveling . . . . One day when we had stopped, a [German] workman took a piece of bread out of his bag and threw it into a wagon. There was a stampede. Dozens of starving men fought each other to the death for a few crumbs. The German workmen took a lively interest in this spectacle.
>
> . . . . In the wagon where the bread had fallen, a real battle had broken out. Men threw themselves on top of each other, stamping on each other, tearing at each other, biting each other. Wild beasts of prey, with animal hatred in their eyes; an extraordinarily vitality had seized them, sharpening their teeth and nails.
>
> A crowd of workmen and curious spectators had collected along the train. They had probably never seen a train with such a cargo. Soon, nearly everywhere, pieces of bread were being dropped into the wagons. The audience stared at these skeletons of men, fighting one another to the death for a mouthful.
>
> A piece fell into our wagon. I decided that I would not move. Anyway, I knew that I would never have the strength to fight with a dozen savage men! Not far away I noticed an old man dragging himself

along on all fours. He was trying to disengage himself from the struggle. He held one hand to his heart. I thought at first he had received a blow in the chest. Then I understood; he had a bit of bread under his shirt. With remarkable speed he drew it out and put it to his mouth. His eyes gleamed; a smile, like a grimace, lit up his dead face. And was immediately extinguished. A shadow had just loomed up near him. The shadow threw itself upon him. Felled to the ground, stunned with blows, the old man cried:

"Meir. Meir, my boy! Don't you recognize me? I'm your father . . . you're hurting me . . . you're killing your father! I've got some bread . . . for you too . . . for you too . . . ."

He collapsed. His fist was still clenched around a small piece. He tried to carry it to his mouth. But the other one threw himself upon him and snatched it. The old man again whispered something, let out a rattle, and died amid the general indifference. His son searched him, took the bread, and began to devour it. He was not able to get very far. Two men had seen and hurled themselves upon him. Others joined in. When they withdrew, next to me were two corpses, side by side, the father and the son. I was fifteen years old.

The train finally stopped at Buchenwald, a concentration camp near the German city of Weimar. Weimar had been the birthplace of Germany's greatest writer and humanist, Wolfgang von Goethe. The camp had been built around the tree under which he used to sit and think. A few months later Buchenwald was liberated by Allied troops.

III. SOME QUESTIONS-SOME ANSWERS

Why Was There So Little Resistance to Hitler?

Hitler effectively muzzled the opposition, any opposition, through intimidation, by invoking the specter of concentration camps, by torture and by murder. Children were encouraged to spy on their parents and to report them to the authorities if they suspected them of being disloyal to the regime. Every city block had its Nazi spy. In a sense, Germany was one large concentration camp because, as in the real thing, all power was vested at the top and resistance from below was virtually impossible. Moreover, citizens who oppose their government in a time of war run the risk of being branded as traitors, however tyrannical and however misguided the reasons for going to war. Even so, there were people in Germany who resisted, before and during the war, but their efforts were, on the whole, inconsequential. In 1943, the young men and women of a small group of university students known as the White Rose, distributed anti-Nazi leaflets and covered the walls of Munich with slogans such as "Down with Hitler" and "Freedom".

Betrayed, they were subsequently tried before the 'People's Court' and beheaded. Most Germans opposed to Hitler kept a low profile, however. Pastor Niemoeller, an opponent of the regime who kept silent until it was too late placed himself in this broad category. "In Germany," he wrote:

> "the Nazis came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time there was no one left to speak for me."

Hans and Sophie Scholl

Pastor Niemoeller

What did the Allies Do While Millions of Jews Were Slaughtered?

By August, 1942, the United States and its allies knew that Hitler had embarked on a program to kill every Jew in Europe. In November this news was released to the press and thus available to everyone in the free world. A month earlier, thirteen-year-old Anne Frank, hiding from the Nazis in a loft in Amsterdam, wrote in her world-famous diary concerning the fate of Jews: "We assume that most of them are murdered. The English radio speaks of their being gassed." In August, 1943, *The New York Times* produced evidence of a list of nearly 2.5 million people starved or killed by the Nazis. The Allies hardly seemed to notice.

As for the U.S., it did not take any rescue action until January 1944. Its "basic policy was not rescue but avoidance of rescue," concluded an American historian. Auschwitz could have been bombed but wasn't. The Congress, too, showed little interest.

Newspapers tended to tuck away the news of the Jews' mass murder on the inside pages. And while American Jewry as a whole craved rescue action, influential Jews close to the President for one reason or another did little to promote it in the inner circles of power. The overriding attitude in the democratic West was that the solution to everything was to win the war as quickly as possible.

Did Anyone Try to Help?

While the world stood by silently and many people in Nazi-dominated Europe closed their eyes to or collaborated in the wholesale slaughter of the Jews, there were a few who were moved by their conscience to help the persecuted. Their number has been estimated as somewhere between 50,000 and 500,000. One nation, Denmark, succeeded in ferrying nearly all of its 7,000 Jews to safety in neutral Sweden. Had it not been for the assistance of non-Jews, Anne Frank and her fellow fugitives in hiding could not have survived for two years in the "secret annex" in Amsterdam.

Raoul Wallenberg

Probably the best-known example of a non-Jew who did everything in his power to save Jews without a promise of reward was the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg. Posted in Hungary during the roundups and deportations of Jews in 1944, Wallenberg extended Swedish visas to thousands of Jews, saving them from deportation and certain death. He often appeared among them brandishing his priceless papers even as the victims-to-be stood waiting for the train that would take them to Auschwitz.

Aristides de Sousa Mendes with one of his rescued, 1940

Another diplomat, Aristides de Sousa Mendes, the Portuguese consul in Bordeaux, France, passed out some 10,000 visas to Jewish refugees and another 20,000 to non-Jews. Before his assembled staff at the Bordeaux consulate de Sousa Mendes explained why he was doing what he was doing -- and defying his own government in the process: "I cannot allow these people to die. Many are Jews and our constitution says that the religion, or the politics of a foreigner shall not be used to deny his refuge in Portugal. I have decided to follow this principle . . . . Even if I am dismissed, I can only act as a Christian, as my conscience tells me."

Both Wallenberg and de Sousa Mendes, have been officially honored by the Jews as "Righteous Among the Nations", as have thousands of other lesser-known non-Jewish rescuers of Jews.

Who Were the Killers?

The most frightening thing about the killers is that most of them were normal people. Many came from decent families and had decent educations. They were not monsters. The SS torturers were not twisted, concluded Primo Levi, an Italian-Jewish survivor of Auschwitz, "they were made of the same cloth as we, they were average human beings, averagely intelligent, averagely wicked: . . . they had our faces, but they had been reared badly." Being "reared badly" was something most of the SS regarded as a compliment and a mark of distinction.

A camp commandant at home

Certainly no one was prouder of his SS savages than Heinrich Himmler. In the course of a speech to his senior SS officers during a 1943 visit to Poland, the SS chief asked that he be permitted to speak on "a very grave matter." "Among ourselves," he added, "it should be mentioned quite frankly, and yet we will never speak of it publicly:

> "I mean the evacuation of the Jews, the extermination of the Jewish race. It's one of those things it is easy to talk about. 'The Jewish race is being exterminated,' says one Party member, 'that's quite clear, it's in our program -- elimination of the Jews and we're doing it, exterminating them.' And then they come, eighty million worthy Germans, and each has his decent Jew. Of course the others are vermin, but this one is an A-1 Jew.
>
> Not one of all those who talk this way has watched it, not one of them has gone through it. Most of you must know what it means when one hundred corpses are lying side by side, or five hundred, or one thousand. To have stuck it out and at the same time -- apart from exceptions caused by human weakness -- to have remained decent fellows, that is what has made us hard. This is a page of glory in our history which has never to be written and is never to be written . . . . We had the moral right, we had the duty to our people, to destroy this

people which wanted to destroy us. . . . Altogether, however, we can say that we have fulfilled this most difficult duty for the love of our people. And our spirit, our soul, our character has not suffered from it."

How it would be possible for Jews to destroy Germany without guns, planes and tanks, without a country and without industry is a mystery only Hitler and his fanatical Nazi followers could explain.

More Lies

The Nazis used every means to deceive Jews and to stop them from mounting any resistance. For one, they did not tell the Jews that they intended to kill them. Jews were told that they were going to be "resettled in the East" and be put to work. All the death camps were established in areas remote from Europe's centers of communication. Sometimes the Nazis forced deportees to write to their relatives or acquaintances that they were in labor camps and that all was well. By the time these postcards or letters were postmarked, their "authors" often had already been killed. Jews "selected" to be killed and not yet aware of it would be invited "to ride to the camp" in trucks bearing the Red Cross logo. The trucks would deposit them at the gas chambers instead.

The perpetrators of the "final solution" were sworn to strict secrecy. A document originating in the "Jewish Department" of the Reich Security Main Office dated August 29, 1943, instructed the commanding officers of the German Security Police in France, Belgium and the Netherlands to make sure "that Jews about to be evacuated receive no disturbing revelations of any kind about the place

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or manner of the utilization which is in store for them. In particular," the document continued, "I should ask you to take pains to instruct the accompanying guards before every journey not to instill thoughts of resistance in the Jews by voicing in their presence suppositions about types of quarters, etc. Auschwitz is most desirous that in view of urgent construction programs the receipt of the transports and their further distribution may be carried out as smoothly as possible."

One camp, Theresienstadt, was established for the sole purpose of deceiving the world. Theresienstadt, located in what is today Czechoslovakia, was not a death camp but a so-called "ghetto" for so-called "privileged" Jews -- Jews who had been decorated in World War I fighting for Germany; Jews with powerful German friends; Jews with powerful non-German friends; Jews the Nazis thought might be useful to them at some point, and Jews who had been useful to them in the past. The camp boasted a "coffee shop," a number of orchestras, even a jazz-playing band called the "Ghetto Swingers," and inmates routinely put on cabaret performances. But from this place, too, prisoners disappeared by the trainloads in the Auschwitz gas chambers.

The Butterfly

The last, the very last,
So richly, brightly, dazzlingly yellow.
Perhaps if the sun's tears would sing
Against a white stone . . .

Such, such a yellow
Is carried lightly 'way up high.
It went away I'm sure because it wished to
Kiss the world goodbye.

For seven weeks I've lived in here,
Penned up inside this ghetto
But I have found my people here.
The dandelions call to me
And the white chestnut candles in the court.
Only I never saw another butterfly.

That butterfly was the last one.
Butterflies don't live in here,
In the ghetto.

Theresienstadt, Pavel Friedman (21)
June 6, 1942

In April, 1944, a delegation from the International Red Cross received permission to visit this "Model Camp", after the Nazis had spent the previous seven months preparing it for their inspection. "We had expected worse", summarized the chief spokesperson reporting on the visit.

A shroud of secrecy enveloped the mass killings. Though the Nazi press occasionally alluded to the Jews' "disappearance" from Europe, not a single story about it appeared in the German newspapers. Yet people knew, even if no one talked about it. Even among themselves the Nazis were loathe to call a spade a spade, and sometimes even the euphemisms they employed to hide the reality were deemed too suggestive. The term "special treatment', for example, stood for gassing. In April, 1942, however, Himmler let

it be known that "no mention be made of the 'special treatment of the Jews.' It must be called 'transportation of the Jews towards the Russian East.'"

The very enormity of the crime disposed people not to believe it. Jews -- and not just Jews -- simply could not believe that a civilized European nation like Germany had lapsed into barbarism. Even when escapees (a rare occurrence) told their tale, they found few listeners. By the time the frightening reality could no longer be denied, it was too late; too late, because by then most of the Jews no longer had the strength to fight back.

Nowhere was this denial of reality greater than among the Jews of Western Europe. When these began being bundled off "to the East" in the summer of 1942, they could not imagine what lay in store for them. Though many had heard "rumors" of terrible happenings, few took such tidings seriously. Told that they were being "evacuated" to work in "the East", most Jews took the Germans at their word or simply blocked the bleakest scenario from their minds. But while in Poland the Germans saw no reason to tone down their brutality, in the countries of the West -- Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, and France -- they tended to keep the gloves on for fear of kindling local resistance.

The gloves came off in the death camps. No sooner did the victims arrive in "SS Special Unit Resettlement Camp" Sobibor, than they were driven into the gas chambers with clubs and rifle butts, leaving them no time to think. New arrivals at Auschwitz, recalled a survivor, had no idea of what lay ahead. Guards told them that they were going to take a "shower". To calm their nerves, a physician was always present at these gassings. In the dressingrooms next to the gas chamber were benches and hooks to hang up one's clothes. "Wash yourselves well" admonished a sign on the wall, and arrows pointed to other signs that said "To the bathhouse". Sometimes a band played at the site of the gas chambers, and sometimes people were given a piece of soap and even a towel before entering.

Jews who had passed the "selection" were hardly safe. The work was hard, the blows constant, and the food inadequate to sustain life. "During the latter part of our imprisonment," wrote a survivor of Auschwitz,

"the daily ration consisted of very watery soup given out once daily, and the usual small bread ration. In addition to that, there was the so-called 'extra allowance,' consisting of three fourths of an ounce of margarine, or a slice of poor quality sausage, or a little piece of cheese, or a bit of synthetic honey, or a spoonful of watery jam, varying daily. In calories,

> this diet was absolutely inadequate, especially taking into consideration our heavy manual work and our constant exposure to the cold in inadequate clothing . . . . When the last layers of subcutaneous fat had vanished, and we looked like skeletons disguised with skin and rags, we could watch our bodies beginning to devour themselves. The organism digested its own protein, and the muscles disappeared. Then the body had no powers of resistance left. One after another the members of the little community in our hut died. Each of us could calculate with fair accuracy whose turn would be next, and when his own would come."

Those whose strength and health gave out became prime candidates for the ever-menacing "selections". A few people succeeded in escaping. But there was no place to run to, and nearly all were brought back to the camp and hanged in full view of the inmates in order to deter others from following their example.

"Man, Get that Dog!"

Barry

The entire system was designed to break the prisoners' spirit and capacity to resist. That done, it was easier to kill them. An important step in this process was their dehumanization and depersonalization. Which was the purpose behind the numbers, the shaved heads, the uniforms, the kicks and the punches, the endless roll calls, the "gymnastics" (strenuous, purposeless "exercise"), the often meaningless labor, and the thousand-and-one humiliations. The Jews were literally regarded as animals, asserted one of the few survivors of Sobibor. There was a dog there, he recalled, named Barry, which his master called 'Mensch' (man, human being), and whenever he set Barry on the prisoners, he would say: "'Man, get that dog!'"

Trapped in this hell, the victims waged a desperate struggle to stay alive. In the race against death many were forced to shed a good part of their prewar selves, their morality and their ethics, as so much excess baggage. Asked how she was able to survive Auschwitz, a woman replied: "My principle is: I come first, second, and third. Then nothing, then again I, and then all the others." She was the norm. It was the logical consequence of a system that spread its "inhumanity in all directions", corrupting both "its victims and its opponents."

Did the Victims Fight Back?

In the course of his interrogations of Nazi war criminals the psychologist Gustave Gilbert asked Rudolf Hoess how it was technically possible to kill so many people.

"Technically? . . . That wasn't so hard – it would not have been hard to exterminate even greater numbers," Hoess responded. "The killing itself took the least time. You could dispose of 2,000 head in a half hour, but it was the burning that took all the time. The killing was easy; you don't even need guards to drive them into the chambers: they just went in expecting to take showers and, instead of water we turned on poisoned gas. The whole thing went very quickly."

Jewish resistance fighters

Hoess made it seem that Jews went like sheep to the slaughter. That simply is not true. To fight to the death when one's own life or the lives of dear ones are in jeopardy is a natural human reaction. And fight back Jews did, despite everything and against overwhelming odds. About 350 inmates, for example took part in a revolt at Sobibor. Four hundred to 600 inmates bolted to freedom, though most were subsequently captured and only a few lived to tell about it. "On October 14, 1943, at about 5 p.m.," drily reported the Order Police of the district of Lublin, "revolt of the Jews in SS-camp Sobibor, 25 miles north of Cholm. They overpowered the guards, seized armory, and after fire fight with camp garrison fled in unknown direction. Nine SS murdered, 1 SS man missing, 2 foreign guards shot to death.

Approximately 300 Jews escaped, the remainder were shot to death or are now in camp. Military police and armed forces were notified immediately and took over security of the camp at about 1 a.m. The area south and southwest of Sobibor is now being searched by police and armed forces."

Two months earlier, members of the Special Detachment unit in Treblinka had succeeded in blowing up the crematorium. By hiding one of their men inside the Treblinka arsenal, they succeeding in capturing hand grenades, rifles, revolvers and ammunition. Amidst the chaos and shooting and the spreading flames, more than 150 Jews managed to escape. Almost 20 Nazis were killed. The Germans, in turn, killed the Jews left in the camp.

The ways of resistance were many. A girl who defiantly overturned a bowl of "soup" was a resister. Some prayed; others refused to stoop to the level of their persecutors, choosing death rather than sacrifice their humanity. Mere survival was a form of resistance. Jews resisted even in Berlin, the hub of the Third Reich, where a group of young Jews led by Herbert Baum put up anti-Nazi posters and set fire to an anti-Soviet exhibition. Caught, all 27 of them were shot on May 18, 1942. Jews fought in partisan units in the forests and swamps of Russia, and joined the underground in France, Belgium and the Netherlands. Twenty-three-year-old Hannah Senesh volunteered from

Palestine to be air-dropped into Hungary on D-Day (June 6, 1944) with the object of making contact with the Hungarian and Slovak resistance. She was captured on the Hungarian border and executed on November 7. Six months earlier, while working with the Yugoslavian Resistance, she wrote the poem "Blessed is the Match":

Blessed is the match consumed
in kindling flame
Blessed is the flame that burns
in the secret fastness of the heart.
Blessed is the heart with strength to stop
its beating for honor's sake.
Blessed is the match consumed
in kindling flame.

Hannah Senesh

But the best known act of resistance took place in Warsaw, where in the spring of 1943 a handful of Jews with a few guns and Molotov cocktails held off the mighty German army for several weeks. The Warsaw Revolt was the first major act of organized civilian resistance to the Nazis in all of Europe.

As the Germans entered the ghetto on the morning of April 19 expecting to put the finishing touches to its destruction, twelve hundred Jewish fighters armed with 2 submachine guns, 17 rifles, about 500 pistols, several thousand grenades and incendiary bottles were waiting for them. The great German army was forced to retreat. By the end of the first week of May some 100 Jewish fighters were making a last stand in a bunker under 18 Mila Street. The Nazis bombarded the entrance and sent gas into the bunker. Some chose suicide rather than fall into German hands. A few succeeded in getting through a hidden exit, suddenly discovered; the rest suffocated. On May 16, General Jurgen Stroop proudly reported to his superiors in Berlin that the Warsaw ghetto 'is no longer in existence.' Most of the 30,000 Jews seized in the ghetto were deported to Treblinka, where they were gassed.

While the fighting was raging in Warsaw, the poet Hirsh Glick in Vilna (Lithuania) composed a song that became an inspiration to Jews everywhere. "Never Say" was a call to action:

Never say that there is only death for you
Though leaden skies may be concealing days of blue --
Because the hour we have hungered for is near;
Beneath our tread the earth shall tremble:
WE ARE HERE!

This song was written with our blood and not with lead;
It's not a song that birds sing overhead,
It was a people, among toppling barricades,
That sang this song of ours with pistols and grenades.

The German army puts down the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt

People fought back even in Auschwitz. On October 7, 1944, hundreds of men from the Special Detachment at Crematorium IV did the unthinkable: they disobeyed an order; they refused to leave the camp because they knew that leaving it was tantamount to signing their own death warrant. They threw themselves on their guards with picks, crowbars and axes. Some of the prisoners succeeded in running into the empty barracks, where they set fire to the mattresses. The fire spread and burned down Crematorium IV. Special Squad members in other parts of the camp joined in the revolt. A few hundred men cut the wire and fled into the nearby countryside. All of them were captured and shot. The women who had secured the explosives used in the revolt and the men suspected of plotting it were arrested and tortured. All the men died during the interrogation. The women were hanged. None talked.

What Happened to Those Who Planned and Carried Out the Crimes against Humanity?

After the war, in 1945 and 1946, the Allies put what was left of the Nazi leadership on trial in the city of Nuremberg -- the first time in world history that the leaders of a nation had been brought into a courtroom to be judged for crimes committed while in power. With characteristic defiance, Goering reacted to the indictment by scribbling under it: "The victor will always be the judge, and the vanquished the accused."

Specifically, the former Nazi leaders were accused of crimes against peace, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. The category "Crimes against Humanity" included

"murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian population, before or during the war, or persecutions on political, racial or religious grounds in execution of or in connection with any crimes within jurisdiction of the Tribunal, whether or not in violation of the domestic law of the country where perpetrated."

The Nuremberg Trials

The men in the dock invariably pleaded innocent. They said that they had acted under orders, and that the man who gave the orders was Adolf Hitler. Hitler, conveniently, was dead. "We have been educated in absolute obedience, hierarchy, nationalism," ran their standard argument,

> "we have been imbued with slogans, intoxicated with ceremonies and demonstrations; we have been taught that the only justice was that which was to the advantage of our people and that the only truth was the words of the Leader. What do you want from us? How can you even think to expect from us, after the fact, a behavior different from ours and that of all those who were like us? We were the diligent executors, and for our diligence we were praised and promoted. The decisions were not ours because the regime in which we grew up did not permit

autonomous decisions: others have decided for us, and that was the only way it could have happened because our ability to decide had been amputated. Therefore we are not responsible and cannot be punished."

This description, by Primo Levi, of the Nazi mind-set, fit the likes of Rudolf Hoess like a glove. Asked to describe his reaction to Hitler's order decreeing the murder of millions of Jews, the former commandant of Auschwitz typically responded: "I had nothing to say, I could only say Jawohl (yes) . . . . We could only execute orders without any further consideration. That is the way it was." Gustave Gilbert, the American appointed trial psychologist, then asked whether he could have disobeyed the order. "No, from our entire training the thought of refusing an order just didn't enter one's head, regardless of what kind of order it was."

NON-JEWISH VICTIMS OF NAZI RULE
In all occupied lands, the Nazis carried out large-scale reprisals against completely innocent and unarmed civilians, whenever a single German soldier was killed by partisans, or even when German property was attacked. In mass-murder actions against non-Jews, they also massacred 2 million unarmed Soviet prisoners-of-war, 1 million Soviet civilians, more than 1 million Polish civilians, and 1½ million Yugoslav civilians. In May 1940, at two villages near Dunkirk, a total of 170 disarmed British prisoners-of-war were murdered in cold blood. In June 1944, at three villages near Caen 70 disarmed Canadian prisoners-of-war were likewise murdered by German S.S. troops.
Twenty-six of many thousands of Nazi reprisal and murder actions against unarmed non-Jews, with the approximate number murdered in each massacre
Countries in each of which more than a million non-Jewish civilians died as a result of deliberate Nazi brutality
In each of the actions shown here, unarmed men, women and children, almost all non-Jews, were chosen as the victims of Nazi hatred and vengeance. Many of those killed were beaten to death by blows of rifle butts, burned to death after petrol had been poured over them and ignited while they were still alive, or stripped naked and then shot. Those murdered at Kissura included 50 children under ten years of age. At Meuling, all those killed were women patients in a mental hospital. In the Ardeatine caves in Rome, 253 Catholics and 70 Jews were murdered, among them many shopkeepers, students, lawyers and peddlers.
An estimated 32,000 German civilians were executed between 1933 and 1945 for so-called "political" offences. Those killed included Conservatives, Socialists, Communists, Catholics, Protestants, writers, journalists and teachers. All over Europe, non-Jews who were discovered sheltering Jews were also shot.
POLAND
GERMANY
FRANCE
HUNGARY
RUMANIA
BULGARIA
CRETE
English Channel
Adriatic Sea
Black Sea

The judges in Nuremberg did not consider this a valid defense and held the accused individually accountable for their deeds. Twenty-five of the defendants were sentenced to death by hanging, 97 received prison terms ranging from time served to 25 years, and 20 were put away for life. Thirty-five were declared not guilty. Some of the biggest fish got away, however. Goering, Goebbels and Hitler committed suicide. Eichmann escaped to Brazil but was subsequently captured. Mengele died a few years ago, also in Brazil.

What about those at the intermediate and lower levels? Could they have refused to become accessories to the crimes, and were they equally responsible?

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Approximately 6,000 SS-men served in Auschwitz during the four years of its existence. Not one is known to have refused an order, even though the consequences were not nearly as catastrophic as they were made out to be. The worst thing that could happen was to be sent to the Eastern front, admittedly rather more dangerous than torturing and killing defenseless people, but the fate of millions of soldiers in this war.

Nor did most of their immediate superiors ever see the inside of a courtroom, as was noted by a former Auschwitz guard in the course of a trial held in Germany between 1963 and 1965. "I knew them all," the accused exploded, "all those who were above me. This room is too small to hold them all. But where are they now, these gentlemen who were my superiors and my leaders? They are the guilty, these gentlemen who sat behind their desks and only used the telephone."

Thousands of the "small (and not-so-small) cogs" in the Nazi death machine disappeared without a trace, building new lives in countries like Argentina, Australia, Canada, the United States, and in Germany itself.

Perhaps Anne Frank was right to cast her net over all of humanity to account for the war and its unparalleled cruelty. "I don't believe", she wrote in her diary on May 3, 1944, "that the big men, the politicians and the capitalists alone, are guilty of the war. Oh no, the little man is just as guilty, otherwise the peoples of the world would have risen in revolt long ago! There's in people simply an urge to destroy, an urge to kill, to murder and rage, and until all mankind, without exception, undergoes a great change, wars will be waged, everything that has been built up, cultivated, and grown will be destroyed and disfigured, after which mankind will have to begin all over again."

Anne Frank

What Are Some of the Consequences of the Holocaust?

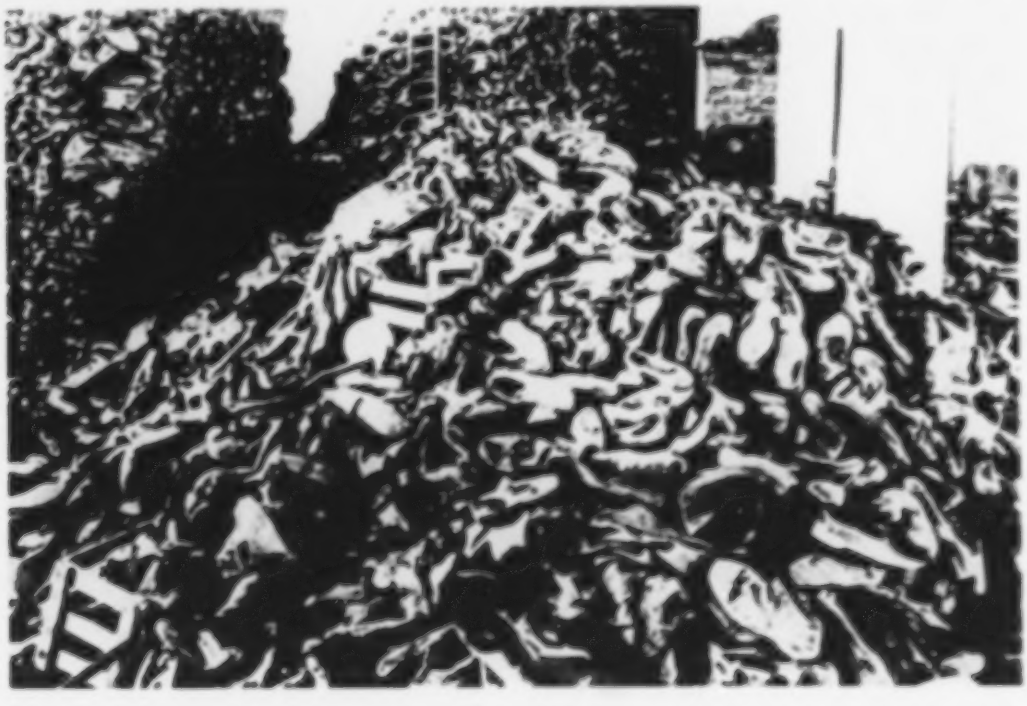
The Holocaust brought to an end two thousand years of Jewish life in Europe, for which it has meant the loss of the spiritual, cultural, scientific, and economic contributions of the Jews. Marx, Freud, Einstein, and Kafka, to mention only a few -- the cultural milieu that produced them is no longer, and will never be again.

But the most devastating impact, of course, was on the Jews themselves. Nearly every surviving European Jew had lost some family members, and many sustained psychological wounds from which they would never recover. Most felt ill at ease, wondering why they had survived while others had perished. Quite a few never fully recovered. All of them were damaged to some degree.

At the end of the war there were perhaps a quarter of a million Jews who had survived the Nazi era in Europe. Thousands surfaced from hiding places, thousands

more returned from the camps. Few had any place to go. Between 1945 and 1948 the world came to know them as Displaced Persons; 142,000 eventually found a home in Israel, 72,000 in the U.S.

The Holocaust constitutes the greatest catastrophe in Jewish history. It reduced world Jewry by one-third. "If we were to survey the hurt inflicted by the Germans upon the Jews," concludes a Holocaust historian, "we would have to measure the impact of these deaths upon those who were closest to the victims; we would have to think about the long-range effects of the entire destruction process upon Jewry as a whole. All this adds up to a vast, almost nonassessable loss."



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CHRONOLOGY 1918-1945

1918-1933

1918 End of World War I

1918 Fall of German and Austro-Hungarian Empires

1919-1933 Weimar Republic

1919 Founding of the Nazi Party

"Stabbed in the back"

1922 Mussolini in power in Italy

1922 Hitler's failed Putsch

1923 French occupy Ruhr

1923 Inflation in Germany

Unemployed in Berlin, 1932

1924-1929 Period of stability in Germany

1929 The Great Depression

1933

January 30
Appointment of Adolf Hitler as Reich Chancellor

March
Establishment of the first concentration camp in Nazi Germany: Dachau

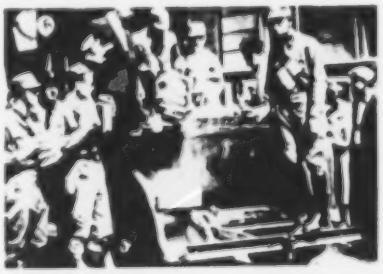
April
Boycott of Jewish businesses

Law Regarding Admission to Legal Profession, excluding "non-Aryan" lawyers

Law Against Overcrowding of German Schools, introducing quotas for Jews in schools

"Wear it With Pride, the Yellow Badge," and "Say Yes to Judaism" - articles in Jewish newspaper in Germany designed to bolster Jewish self-esteem

May
Public burning of Jewish books and of books by opponents of Nazism



July
Nazi Party proclaimed by law the one and only legal political party in Germany

THE RISE AND FALL OF NAZI GERMANY	PERSECUTION AND HOLOCAUST	JEWISH RESPONSE
	September Law Regarding Establishment of a Reich Camber of Culture; basis for exclusion of "non-Aryans" from art, music, literature, etc.	American Jewish Congress declares boycott of Nazi Germany Founding of Jewish Cultural Union and national body representing all Jews, both aimed to soften blows of persecution
October Germany witdraws from the League of Nations	Law Regarding Editors; exclusion of "non-Aryans" from journalism	
1934		
	Law Regarding Expulsion from the Reich; basis for deportation of Eastern European Jews	
June The "Night of the Long Knives," the murderous purge of the S.A.		

1935

Conscription reimposed throughout Germany, in open contravention of the Treaty of Versailles

The Aryan cult of the he man mocked. 'A healthy body houses a healthy mind - but sometimes only a very small one.'

Defense Law; exclusion "non-Aryans" from the army

General strike of Polish Jews in protest against antisemitism

September
Reich Law on Citizenship
Basic anti-Jewish racial legislation passed at Nuremberg; Jews' status changed from citizen to subject
Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor; intermarriage made a criminal offense

Jews redouble efforts to leave Germany

Compulsory retirement of Jewish officials

THE RISE AND FALL OF NAZI GERMANY	PERSECUTION AND HOLOCAUST	JEWISH RESPONSE

1936-37

Olympics held in Germany

The German Army enters the Rhineland

Hitler and Mussolini form Rome-Berlin Axis

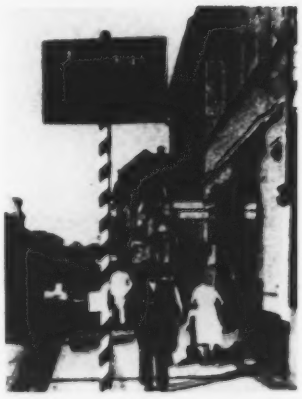
Germany and Japan sign military pact

Minor decrees and ordinances supplementing earlier legislation issued during these two years

July 1937
Buchenwald concentration camp opens

1938

Germany annexes Austria



"Jews not wanted"

September 29-30
Munich Conference, attended by Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler and Mussolini. Britain and France agree to the German annexation of part of Czechoslovakia

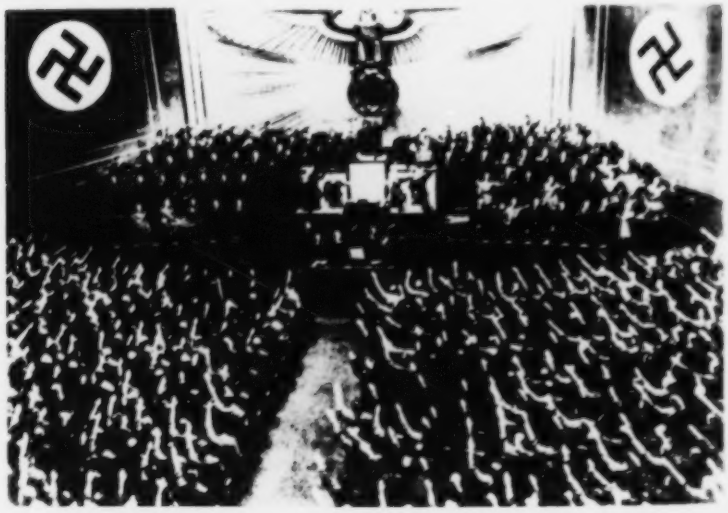
Exclusion of Jews from industrial enterprises

Cancelation of licenses for Jewish physicians with exceptions for care of Jewish patients

Mass anti-Nazi rally in New York under the auspices of the Joint Boycott Council

THE RISE AND FALL *OF NAZI GERMANY*	PERSECUTION AND *HOLOCAUST*	JEWISH RESPONSE
		International Conference at Evian, France, fails to find havens for German Jews
	Compulsory Jewish first names	
	Jewish lawyers banned from practicing law except for representing Jewish clients	
"Kristallnacht"	Passports of Jews marked with letter "J"	
	Over 17,000 Jews of Polish citizenship expelled from Germany to Zbaszyn on Polish border	
	November 9-10 *"Kristallnacht"* Anti-Jewish riots in Germany and Austria. 30,000 Jews arrested, 191 synagogues destroyed, 7,500 shops looted, many deaths	Herschel Grynszpan assassinates Ernst vom Rath, Third Secretary of the German Embassy in Paris
	Jewish children expelled from German schools	
	Jews banned from certain districts; hours of public appearance restricted	

Final elimination of all Jews from German economy



1939

Germany occupies Czechoslovakia

Soviet-German Pact signed by Molotov and Ribbentrop

September 1
German army invades Poland - beginning of World War II

September 3
Britain and France declare war on Germany

September 17
Invasion of Eastern Poland by the the Soviet Union

Germany annexes Western Poland

September 21
Ghettos to be established in occupied Poland each under a "Jewish Council," by order of Reinhard Heydrich

Distinctive identifying armband made obligatory for all Jews in Central Poland

THE RISE AND FALL OF NAZI GERMANY	PERSECUTION AND HOLOCAUST	JEWISH RESPONSE

First Polish Ghetto established in Piotrkow

The Jewish Community of Palestine demands participation in the war against Nazism: 26,000 join the British Army

Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum, Polish-Jewish historian, convenes a conference in Warsaw with representative of underground parties in order to discuss providing aid to Polish Jews

1940

Establishment of Auschwitz concentration camp

Germany occupies Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium and France

Mass demonstrations by starving people in Lodz Ghetto

Beginnings of "Jewish Army" in France

THE RISE AND FALL OF NAZI GERMANY	PERSECUTION AND HOLOCAUST	JEWISH RESPONSE

Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Axis

Hungary, Rumania and Slovakia join the Axis

1941

German army invades Yugoslavia and Greece

Heydrich appointed by Goering to carry out the "Final Solution"

Germany attacks USSR

Establishment of Theresienstadt Ghetto in Czechoslovakia

Units from Jewish Palestine take part in Allied invasion in Syria

October
The Germans approach Moscow: partial evacuation of the city

Chelmno extermination camp opened near Lodz; by April 1943, 360,000 Jews murdered there

December 7
Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor

December 11

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THE RISE AND FALL OF NAZI GERMANY	PERSECUTION AND HOLOCAUST	JEWISH RESPONSE

1942

January 20
Wannsee Conference; coordination of state and Nazi Party agencies for the extermination of the Jews of Europe

"United Partisan Organization" set up in the Vilna Ghetto

March
Extermination begins at Sobibor; by October 1943, 250,000 Jews murdered there

June
German and Italian armies reach El Alamein: danger of attack in Suez area

Deportation of 60,000 Slovakian Jews to the East

Extermination begins at Belzec; by the end of 1942, 600,000 Jews murdered there

Anne Frank

Treblinka extermination camp opened; 700,000 Jews murdered there by August 1943

July
Beginning of the large-scale "Aktion" in the Warsaw Ghetto; by mid- September, 300,000 Jews deported to Treblinka to be murdered

"Jewish Fighting Organization" set up in the Warsaw Ghetto

THE RISE AND FALL OF NAZI GERMANY	PERSECUTION AND HOLOCAUST	JEWISH RESPONSE
	"Aktion" in Lwow Ghetto, 40,000 Jews deported to extermination camps	
November British victorious over the Germans and Italians at El Alamein		Armed resistance in various ghettos in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe during the second half of 1942
Major counter-attack by the Red Army in the Stalingrad region	 *The German army puts down the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt*	
1943		
April Bermuda Conference: fruitless discussion by U.S. and British delegates on deliverance of Nazi victims		Jewish combat organizations set up in Cracow (Poland); attacks on German soldiers
	Liquidation of Warsaw Ghetto	Warsaw Ghetto Revolt
	Himmler orders liquidation of all ghettos in Poland and USSR	
July Revolt in Italy; Mussolini deposed by Badoglio		

THE RISE AND FALL OF NAZI GERMANY	PERSECUTION AND HOLOCAUST	JEWISH RESPONSE
September 20 Rome occupied by Germans. German army in command of most of the territory of Italy		
		July-September Hundreds of underground fighters leave the Vilna Ghetto for the forests
	Order for the expulsion of Danish Jews thwarted when Danish underground evacuates some 7,000 Jews to Sweden	Revolt in Treblinka
November Teheran Conference - meeting of Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill		
		Palestinian parachutists are dropped in Rumania
December The Allies resolve to inflict punishment on the exterminators of the Jewish people		

The Shock of Liberation

THE RISE AND FALL OF NAZI GERMANY	PERSECUTION AND HOLOCAUST	JEWISH RESPONSE

1944-45

March
German army invades Hungary

May 15
Deportation of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz begins. 380,000 deported by June 27

June 6, 1944
Allied invasion of Normandy

July 20, 1944
Abortive attempt on Hitler's life by group of Nazi officers

October
14,000 Jews transported from Slovakia to Auschwitz

October 7
Sonderkommando uprising at Auschwitz

January, 1945
Evacuation of Auschwitz; "Death March"

February, 1945
Yalta Conference

April 30
Hitler's suicide

Liberation of Dachau

May 8
Germany surrenders - the end of the Third Reich

GLOSSARY

Antisemitism

Hostility toward Jews as a religious, ethnic, or economic group.

Aryan

The Nordic race designated by the Nazis as the co-called "master race"; has no validity as a racial term.

Auschwitz

The most infamous of all Nazi concentration camps.

Authoritarianism

A political regime in which power is vested in a leader or elite not constitutionally responsible to the people.

Bismarck, Otto von

Prussian chancellor (until 1898) who unified Germany.

Communism

Political creed that holds that power should be in the hands of workers; advocates violent overthrow of government to accomplish this aim.

Concentration Camps

Camps located throughout Nazi-dominated Europe for the incarceration of opponents and other "undesirables" such as Gypsies, Russian POWs, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Jews (the principal target). The most notorious camps were the death camps located in Poland: Auschwitz, Sobibor, Treblinka, Belzec, Chelmno, and Majdanek.

Eichmann, Adolf

Chief of the Jewish Department the Central Reich Security Office charged with the task of organizing the destruction of millions of European Jews.

Enabling Act

Law passed by Hitler in 1933 permitting him to rule without interference from the legislature.

Euthanasia Program

So-called "mercy" killing of people deemed incurably insane or biologically inferior by the Nazis, including Jews and others regarded as "racially valueless." The program culminated in the late 1930's as the first laboratories for mass murder and in the 1940's as training centers for the death camps.

Evian Conference (France)

Convened in 1938 by U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt to discuss relief for Jews seeking to escape from persecution in Germany and East-Central Europe. Thirty-two nations attended.

Fascism

A political philosophy, movement, or regime that exalts the nation above the individual; characterized by a centralized government and headed by a dictatorial leader.

"Final Solution"

Code name used by the Nazis to describe the mass physical extermination of the Jews.

Fuhrer

German for leader; Hitler's title.

Genocide

Deliberate and systematic destruction of a racial, political, or cultural group.

Gestapo

The German internal security police (secret state police) established by the Nazi regime to stamp out opposition.

Goering, Hermann

Hitler's second in command; military and economic chief of the Third Reich

Heydrich, Reinhard

Head of the German Security Police and Security Service; charged with carrying out the "Final Solution."

Hindenburg, Paul von

President of Germany until 1934; appointed Hitler chancellor in January, 1933.

Holocaust

Literally: a complete destruction by fire. Used to describe to systematic destruction of European Jewry during World War II.

Master Race

Term used by National Socialism to designate Germans as being a "superior" race as opposed to the "inferior" races such as Jews, Slavs, Gypsies, Blacks, Chinese, etc.

Mussolini, Benito

Italian leader who had seized power in 1922.

Nationalism

Devotion to one's nation; excessive patriotism; doctrine that national interests come first.

Nazi

Contraction of National Socialism. The term used to describe Hitler's sympathizers.

Nuremberg Laws

Discriminatory anti-Jewish legislation passed in 1935; deprived Jews of their German citizenship.

Pogrom

A word of Russian origin meaning destruction; specifically now, destruction of Jewish life and property.

Putsch

Attempt to overthrow government by violent means.

Reichstag

German legislature

SA (*Sturmabteilung* = Storm Troopers)

The brown-shirted militia that was the private army of the Nazi movement.

SS (Schutzstaffel = Defense Squad)

From a small organization serving as a personal bodyguard to Hitler, the SS grew into a gigantic "engine of terror" without which Nazism might never have solidified its power. Headed by Himmler, it was given the task of implementing the "Final Solution."

Swastika

Ancient religious symbol used by Hitler as the official symbol of the Nazi party.

Third Reich

Hitler's designation for his rule (1933-1945)

Totalitarianism

A government or doctrine in which one political party or group maintains complete control and makes all others illegal.

Treaty of Versailles (1919)

Peace settlement following World War I

Weimar Republic

The German Republic from 1919 to 1933. Its constitutional assembly met in the city of Weimar in 1919.

100 QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST

WEIMAR, HITLER, AND WORLD WAR II

1. What accounts for the rapid collapse of the Weimar Republic? Was it the lack of a German democratic tradition or the blows it sustained in the course of its 14-year existence: the Treaty of Versailles on the heels of defeat in war, revolution, inflation and depression? Concerning the latter, would our democracy hold up better if faced with a similar array of problems? Why or why not?

2. What are the elements of democracy?

3. What did Hitler's imprisonment after the failure of his 1923 coup illustrate about the political situation in the Weimar Republic?

4. How did Hitler come to power? When we say he used the "legal route", what do we mean? Who supported Hitler and why?

5. How and by whom were Darwin's theories applied to human society? What are the dangers of transfering the conditions of the animal world to that of human beings?

6. What was Hitler's concept of history? What, in Hitler's mind, was the function of the state? What ends did he have in mind for the state? How do these ends differ from our own? How do Americans regard the function of the state?

7. Was Hitler correct in stating that the masses are easily duped and swayed?

8. Why do we describe the Nazi state as totalitarian? What was the role of the leader, the Fuhrer, in Nazi Germany? How does "scapegoating" fit into totalitarian ideology?

9. Why is runaway inflation a threat to the social order?

10. Some say that but for the 1929 Depression the Nazis would never have come to power. Discuss this statement. What are people's first concerns in life? Imagine you were jobless and unemployed, how would you have reacted to Hitler's promises?

11. Hitler made Nazism and the state synonymous. What are the dangers of identifying the state with a single political party?

12. A good deal of Hitler's success was due to nationalism. Is nationalism good or bad?

13. What kept nations like England and France from stopping Hitler when he began breaking international agreements?

14. What were Hitler's plans for the conquered territories to the east of Germany? Why were the Nazis more brutal in Poland and Russia than in the Western European countries?

15. "Legal right is what Aryan man deems right; legal wrong is what he rejects." (Alfred Rosenberg, Nazi "philosopher"). Comment.

16. Why did people believe in Nazi propaganda? Why did Hitler feel that the most important vehicle for Nazi "education" was the classroom?

17. Define capitalism, communism, socialism. What is "National Socialism"?

NAZISM AND JEWRY

18. Why did Hitler pick on the Jews?

19. Define antisemitism.

20. What were the roots of Hitler's antisemitism?

21. How, according to Hitler, would Jews back both capitalism and communism? On what did Hitler base his belief that Jews threatened Germany?

22. What is the concept of assimilation? Did assimilation of Jews affect their position in Nazi ideology?

23. Why was persecution of Jews based on 'racial' grounds far more threatening than that based on religious grounds?

24. What was the policy concerning Jews in the first six years of Nazi rule (1933-1939)? How did Jews react to these measures?

25. Why were most German Jews initially reluctant to leave Germany after the Nazis came to power?

26. What is the importance of the Nuremberg Laws? What are the dangers of discriminatory legislation? What is the connection between the Nuremberg Laws and the Holocaust? Can you think of any other countries which have or have had similar laws?

27. In what way did the Nuremberg Laws expose the flaws in Nazi race theories?

28. What was the difference between the persecution of the Jews and the persecution of other groups classified as enemies of the German people by the Nazis?

29. Explain why theories of racial superiority exercise great appeal? Is there such a thing as a "pure" race?

30. How did "Crystal Night" differ from previous acts against Jews? Why was it important for the Nazis to have the "Crystal Night" appear as a "spontaneous" reaction?

31. Imagine being a passenger on the *St. Louis* and keeping a diary. What kind of things might you be writing?

32. Try putting yourself in the position of a German Jew in the 1930's. How do you think you would have responded to persecution and humiliation?

33. How did U.S. immigration laws of the 1930's work to keep people out? What was the mood in the U.S. regarding foreign immigrants at the time? What was the effect of immigration quotas?

34. What were the results of the Evian Conference? How do you think the Nazis interpreted these results?

35. What is the meaning of the word "Holocaust"? Why did the Holocaust happen?

36. What were the stages leading to the "Final Solution"?

37. How did the Nazis convince themselves and others that the Jews deserved to be murdered?

38. How was it possible for the Nazis to deceive Jews and non-Jews alike about the true purposes of the deportations? What were some of their tactics of deception?

39. What methods did the Nazis use to ostracize the Jews in Europe?

40. How and why was the ghetto used as a means to separate and dehumanize the Jews?

41. What were Hitler's plans for the Poles and other so-called "inferior races"?

42. Having passed "selection," how could people survive in a camp like Auschwitz? What resources would you have to draw upon to survive?

43. Is it possible to maintain one's dignity and humanity under extreme conditions such as prevailed in Auschwitz and other camps? Do you think you could have survived in a camp like Auschwitz? What would you have done?

44. What forms did Jewish resistance to the Nazis take? What were the physical and psychological obstacles to armed resistance?

45. Why was the Warsaw Ghetto uprising so significant, even though it was crushed? Assuming you were an inhabitant of the Warsaw Ghetto, do you think you would have been inclined to join the resistance movement?

46. Jewish prisoners in Auschwitz, Sobibor and Treblinka had no real hope of victory when they revolted. Why did they fight?

47. How much suffering can a human being endure before "breaking"? Does suffering make people better or worse? How might a person survive in Auschwitz? What might be the lasting impact of Auschwitz on survivors?

48. What happened to the survivors once Europe was liberated? If you were a survivor, what do you think you would have done?

49. In her diary, Anne Frank wrote: "It's no good to resist, what is going to happen, will happen." Was the Holocaust inevitable or could it have been prevented?

50. If the Jewish state of Israel had existed during the war, why might the Holocaust never have occurred?

51. Can education prevent genocide?

52. Have we changed as a result of the Holocaust? If so, how?

53. Despite all evidence to the contrary, some people deny that the Holocaust ever happened. What possibly could be their motives?

54. Assuming Hitler had won the war, what would Nazi Europe have looked like after ten years?

55. What, if any, are the lessons to be learned from the Holocaust?

56. Was the Holocaust a unique event in history? Why or why not?

PERPETRATORS, BYSTANDERS, RESCUERS

57. If we accept the fact that the perpetrators of the Final Solution were ordinary people and not monsters, what does that tell us about ourselves?

58. How could someone like Rudolf Hoess, commandant of Auschwitz, live a normal family life and engage in daily acts of murder?

59. Why didn't the Allies bomb Auschwitz?

60. What were the methods the Nazis used to force people to comply with their policies of discrimination and genocide?

61. Toward the end of World War II, the Nazis tried to destroy all evidence of their crimes against the Jews. Why?

62. Would you follow an order of a superior if it violated your personal moral convictions? What if refusal carried the death penalty?

63. Could Nazis have refused to participate in the roundups, the deportations, the killings? (The German Military Code provided that: "If the execution of a military order

in the course of duty violates the criminal law, then the superior officer giving the order will bear the sole responsibility therefore. However, the obeying subordinates will share the punishment of the participant, (1) If he has exceeded the order given to him, or (2) It was within his knowledge that the order of his superior officer concerned an act by which it was intended to commit a civil or military crime or transgression.")

64. Do you think the Nuremberg Trials were a good idea?

65. Goering: "The victors write the history." Comment.

66. Were the Nazi criminals correct in testifying that they had followed the laws of their land and the orders of high government officials in persecuting Jews?

67. Is it morally permitted to use data obtained from medical "experiments" performed by doctors at Auschwitz if such data is proven to have advanced our medical knowledge? In your opinion, why did healers become killers?

68. What should be the guidelines for doctors conducting experiments on human beings?

69. Why are most people apathetic regarding other people's suffering? How can one guard against becoming a perpetrator, bystander, or a victim?

70. Should we become involved if the human rights of others are being violated? At what point, do you think, would you begin offering help to victims of persecution? At what point would you start resisting an oppressor?

71. The rescuers knew that if they were caught they would be punished or put to death for disobeying Nazi orders, and yet they disobeyed. How do people make the decision to obey some orders and disobey others, even at the risk of death?

72. What do you think are the reasons some people took risks to help Jews and others, the overwhelming majority, failed to help?

73. Were the people who helped Jews heroes? What is a hero?

74. Can you give some examples of injustice and human suffering in the world today? Is it easier or more difficult today than it was during the Nazi era to extend help to the victims of political persecution? How is the U.S. reacting to current refugee problems?

75. Why would (or should) people put their own lives in jeopardy to help others?

GENERAL

76. Do Americans respect and encourage pluralism? Is racism on the increase or decrease? What steps has the American government taken in the past and present to eliminate discrimination? Could it do more? What are some of the main reasons for discrimination in the U.S.?

77. On what is citizenship based in the United States? What was it based on in Germany?

78. In Germany antisemitism became a potent political weapon for the Nazis. Can you think of other examples in history or in our own time when racial or religious prejudice has been exploited for political purposes?

79. Do you believe that the United States has an obligation to intervene in a foreign country to protect human rights?

80. How are individual liberties safeguarded in the United States? Are we always successful at doing so?

81. What "refugee" problems are there in the world today? How is the U.S. reacting to them?

82. "You deceive yourself if you believe that we can do anything with rationality. I used to think that, too, and protested over and over against the sinister disgrace called anti-Semitism. But it is useless. It is completely futile. What I could state to you--what anyone at all can state in this matter--is certainly only reasons, logical and traditional arguments. No anti-Semite ever listens to them. They listen only to their own hatred, to their own envy--to the most shameful instincts. Nothing else matters to them. They are deaf to reason, justice and morality. No one can have any effect on them." Theodor Mommsen, 19th century German historian. Is this true? Is there any hope that antisemitism or any other racial or religious prejudice can effectively be combatted?

83. How is the Holocaust, this outbreak of barbarism in the Europe of the twentieth century, to be explained?

84. What is genocide? How can racism and prejudice lead to genocide? Is genocide predictable?

85. Why are people generally suspicious or critical of others with different manners or dress?

86. Is it worth dying for abstractions such as "liberty", "freedom", "human dignity", "faith", "friendship"?

87. Are Germans different from Americans, Englishmen, Frenchmen, and so forth? Is there such a thing as a national character? Are all people capable of committing crimes as horrendous as the Holocaust? Could it happen here?

88. Anne Frank's biographer wrote: "Her voice was preserved.... It has outlasted the shouts of the murderers and has soared above the voices of time." Was Anne Frank's voice stronger than the voices of the murderers? Is the spirit stronger than the sword?

89. What have been some examples of genocide in history? In what ways did the massacre of the European Jews differ from other examples of genocide? How can genocides be avoided? Is education the answer? Why should we remember the Holocaust or any other genocide?

90. Discuss the relationship between due process (the protection of individual rights through the fair application and consistent system of laws) and democracy.

91. Is it possible to suppress all free thought?

92. How can the media become a tool for mass murder?

93. What is appeasement? Is it always wrong?

94. Why would anyone want to burn books? Does our society try to control what is being read?

95. Do the laws of a nation indicate its direction? What are or should be the foundation(s) of a nation?

96. "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance." What can people do to prevent liberty from being jeopardized?

97. Should nations feel an obligation to prevent crimes against humanity?

98. Has man's moral progress kept pace with his scientific and technological progress?

99. Was Anne Frank right to believe that "in spite of everything, people are really good at heart?"

100. What is the difference getween legalized, institutionalized racism and bigotry and "less structured" forms? Why was the "legality" of Hitler's program important to his success?

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Key to reading levels:
(E) elementary school; (J) junior high;
(S) senior high; (C) college

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BAY AREA RESOURCE FACILITIES

The Holocaust Center of Northern California
639 - 14th Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94118
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Media Department of the Bureau of Jewish Education
639 - 14th Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94118
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The Agency for Jewish Education of the Greater East Bay
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The National Conference of Christians and Jews
777 North First Street, Mezzanine, San Jose, CA 95112
(408) 286-9663

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